

HOW TO LIBERATE A NATION  
IN THIRTY YEARS OR LESS

81

by

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For my Daddy.

Reality is a concept unknown to most.

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Untitled

Met a gal yesterday  
told me I wasn't  
Black 'cause I'd  
traded my dashikis  
and afros  
for oxfords  
and Miss Clairol.

Did?

Met a man day 'fore  
told me I wasn't  
Black 'cause the  
only Blues I knew  
'bout had  
button-flies.

Yeah?

Saw MLK's fourth cousin  
twice removed  
who told me  
to keep on  
fighting for  
The Dream.

What'd you tell'm?

Told Mr. Twice Removed  
I was fighting for  
the black dream  
of a BMW, even though  
I'd accept  
a Mercedes.

What?

Told Ms. Dashiki  
I preferred Polos  
and I gave up  
Miss Clairol  
for L'Oreal.

Maybe you ain't Black....

Maybe I ain't  
but when my jeans  
fade  
there's still some  
Blues  
left behind.

S. Smith

Wait til Morning

## PREFACE

There are several familiar and famous casualties of the Civil Rights Movement: Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, the four little girls in the Birmingham church. But there were other deaths as well, and in some instances the Movement caused the destruction of entire families. Wait til Morning is the story of one of those families.

The Movement itself began while slavery was still in effect, however, it took almost 100 years for it to fully escalate. By the 1950's, several protests and marches were taking place all over the country. The Black race had grown and wanted to be considered in all ways equal to whites. The idea of segregation was no longer acceptable. Thus the movement to end segregation began to grow, and the leaders of the Movement became idols for the younger generation of blacks.

However, there was also a faction of older whites and older blacks who did not feel change was necessary, let alone possible. These older whites felt that most blacks were troublemakers who must be kept in their place at all times. The older blacks believed that indeed a change might one day come, but it was not up to the race to say when. It was up to God. Thus, not only did members of the Movement have to contend with less than amenable whites, but also

with some older members of the Black race who were against forcing a change. Wait til Morning attempts to portray the eager and idealistic nature of the young who wanted change, and the stubborn, sometimes realistic nature of the old who did not.

It must also be noted that the Civil Rights Movement was made up of many people of all colors, and the Movement affected each person in a different way. Some understood the necessity of non-violent protest and never strayed from Dr. King's way. Others, perhaps overwhelmed by the prevalence of fear and hate, began to practice a kind of reverse racism, thereby maiming or killing whites in retaliation for the deaths of blacks. Still others found a kind of happy medium: non-violent when appropriate, violent when necessary. Yet ultimately, the goal was equal rights for everyone, even though the ends did not always justify the means.

The Movement also caused dissension in the family. While some parents and grandparents believed it safer to wait for a sign from the Lord, the children became militants of the Movement. While some fathers went to fight for the cause, mothers stayed home praying for their safe return. Many of those fathers and children never came home, thus convincing some that the most logical idea was to stay home and wait, and convincing others to go out and fight

in the name of the loved one who was lost. During this time the Black race depended on its mother for the strength it needed to overcome all. The black woman's place was behind her man, guiding and protecting her children, trying to keep the family together at all costs. Hardly an easy task, and far too many mothers lost the battle.

Thus the struggle for equal rights was a turbulent one, to say the least, and Wait til Morning attempts to portray that struggle. It is one of the stories of the many people who made up the Civil Rights Movement, whose stories were never told.

### Characters

Alma Gates--a black woman in her early fifties

Marie Gates--Alma's daughter, in her early twenties

### Setting

Large one-room tenement. In one corner is the makings of a kitchen--a sink, a small stove, a counter, and a cabinet with dishes. On one side of the stage a curtain is drawn, behind which is the glimpse of two twin beds, both made up neatly. A cluttered bureau with a mirror on top is in between the beds.

In the "main" room there is a sofa and matching chair, both worn but covered with lace doilies. There is a table with a small lamp, a rocker, and a make-shift mantle on which lies a picture of Marie at a young age, and a radio, the plug of which is usually concealed but sometimes shows and extends into the "kitchen." There is a small, very old and worn rag doll in the rocker.

There is not enough light in this apartment and there never has been. There are two small windows in the "kitchen" and only in the early morning is there the semblance of just the right amount of light.

The place is not gloomy or dirty--just tired and worn. This is a room that is ready to sit down.

### Time

The play takes place in the course of one evening--a Saturday. It is the Deep South, August, 1958.

Scene 1

Saturday evening, 6:00. Alma is in the "kitchen" ironing. A pile of clothes is on the floor and several blouses are hanging from a chair. Alma is wearing a house dress and bedroom slippers, both rather old and faded. She hums, and every now and then, talks to herself. It is obvious that she is agitated, and it soon becomes apparent that she is upset with Marie. The clothes, however, are taking the punishment.

ALMA

I swear I don't....(Hums.) It just don't make no sense....no matter how you say, it just don't make no sense....(Hums.) And how do she know....what she thank she gone do? Chirrun. Lord jus give me the strength to deal with this'un....(Hums.) Could be it's sumpin' wrong with her, 'cause she sho actin' like she done loss it....be jus my luck to have a loony chile....sho would give Flora Mae sumthin to talk 'bout....be jus my luck....(Imitates the "gossip.") "Ooo chile did you hear what done happen to po' ol' Miss Alma daughter? She done loss her mind for sho and po' ol' Miss Alma don' know what she gwine do. Might be they gone have to take the chile away and you know what go on in them type places...." (She breaks off laughing, then checks herself as if someone might be listening or watching.) I'll kill Flora Mae if I hear her talkin 'bout my chile....ain't like she can talk no way what with her boy up in that pentaintry and all....lease my chile ain't locked up or nuthin....though I reckon she bout ought to be....silly gal....(Hums.) Don' folks know what but they ought to jus wait? Lord gone deliver us from all this....don' they see that? I sees it jus as plain as I sees this here hand of mine right here so why don' they? I swear it don' make no sense....(Hums.) "Wait on the Lord, be of good courage and he shall strengthen thine heart. Wait, I say, on the Lord." Now that's what the Bible say do and that's what I'm gone do....all this here other foolishness is jus that....foolishness....(Hums.) It is and they knows it....straiten that gal out yet if it have to be the las' thang I do....(Hums.) An' you would thank she'd git up and do sumthin 'round this house 'stead of sleepin all the day....I s'pose she thank I'm gone do it all....got another thank comin. (Hums.) Ooo Lord I'm tired. (Continues to iron and hum; every now and then she looks toward the "bedroom.") I know

she awake....cain't nobody sleep that long what's in they right mind....'course she lien not to be in hers.... (Calls.) Marie?....Marie? (To herself.) I know she hear me....(Calls.) Marie I know you hear me....this house ain't that big....(Pause.) All right gone on and lie in there like you don' hear nuthin....'cause I ain't gone call you again....Marie? (To herself.) Well, I ain't callin' her no more....sleepin' all the day away.... (Calls.) Marie Ann Gates? If you don' git outta that bed within the nex few minits you gone wish you had....don' let me come and have to get you out....ain't sleep no way....

(MARIE gives a muffled reply from behind the curtain.)

ALMA

What? What's that you say? (Pause.) I know you said sumthin whether you wantin to repeat it or not....I also know it's way past time for you to be up.

MARIE

(Voice from behind curtain.) I said I ain't sleep....

ALMA

(Interrupts.) I know you ain't sleep, which is why I want you up and in here so's I don' have to yell at you.

MARIE

If you'd let me finish I was gonna say that I cain't possibly be sleep with you in there with all that noise....

ALMA

(Interrupts.) All what noise? I ain't said a thang and I ain't kept up no noise.

MARIE

Ain't you been talkin' to yoself again?

ALMA

No I ain't been talkin' to myself agin and fo yo imformation I nevuh talks to myself cause that's what the senile folks do and I ain't hardly no senile folk.

MARIE

Whatever you say Mama.

ALMA

That's right whatever I say and right now I say agin for you to git outta that bed and come in here and help with

sum of this housework. (Pause.) Did you hear me Marie Ann Gates?

MARIE

Yes I heard you Alma Lynn Gates, now please stop yellin'. I'll be there in a minit.

ALMA

I yell if I want. It's my house. (She makes a face at curtain.)

MARIE

(Enters in disheveled clothes. Her appearance indicates a sleepless nap and she looks in desperate need of coffee.) You jus have to have the las word, don'tcha?

ALMA

Such thangs is childish Marie, an' I ain't no chile. How was yo nap? Y'all want sum coffee?

MARIE

(Sitting on floor.) Desperately.

ALMA

(Goes about the business of making coffee.) I'll say.... desperately. And why is you sittin' on the floor? What's wrong with the chairs in this here room?

MARIE

Ain't nuthin wrong wid'em Mama, and I'll sit in one if it'll make you happy. (She makes no attempt to move.)

ALMA

You don' have to sit in one....you grown....or so you thank.

MARIE

We both know I ain't grown....at lease not as long as I'm livin' in yo house....

ALMA

(Interrupts.) Don' be sassy Marie.

MARIE

Yes'm.

ALMA

An' I see you still on the floor.

MARIE

You said I didn' have to move....

ALMA

Fine....stay there....but don' expect me to serve you no coffee while you down there.

MARIE

Yes'm.

(Long pause in which it becomes obvious that ALMA can't stand MARIE being on the floor.)

ALMA

(Not quite a yell.) Marie git off the floor!

MARIE

(Laughs and moves to a chair.) I knew you couldn' stand it for too long....

ALMA

(Interrupts.) I swear you gone make me lose my religion.

MARIE

(Mumbles.) Only in my dreams.

ALMA

What'd you say?

MARIE

I said cain't nuthin make you lose your religion.

ALMA

That's right, and more folks ought but to learn how to be the same. "The Lord is my light and my salvation...."

MARIE

(Interrupts.) Mama befo you start that can I have some coffee....please? Please?

ALMA

(Goes to get coffee but it is obvious she did not appreciate being interrupted in the midst of her scripture.) Yes, you may.

(ALMA takes coffee mugs to MARIE, gives one to her, keeps one for herself, and sits.)

MARIE

(Sips and groans in delight.) Now Mama you can go on with your quotin'.

ALMA

That ain't funny and don' be sassy Marie.

MARIE

Yes'm. (Pause.) Mama....you gone tell me what's on your mind or not?

ALMA

What make you think there's sumthin on my mind?

MARIE

All right then I'm wrong....ain't nuthin on your mind. You gone tell me what you was in here talkin' to yoself bout?

ALMA

(Outraged.) Marie!

MARIE

Yes'm?

ALMA

I ain't gone tell you agin that I wasn' talkin' to myself!

MARIE

Who was you talkin' to then?

ALMA

I wasn' talkin' to nobody!

MARIE

Ah--tell the truth, shame the devil.

ALMA

You jus full of sass this evenin' ain't you?

MARIE

Yes'm. (Pause.) Oh Mama I'm sorry. I didn' mean to hurt your feelin's.

ALMA

Well jus what if I don' 'cept your 'pology, Miss Sassy?

MARIE

That wouldn't be Christian-like....

ALMA  
Well you jus bettuh be glad I'm a Christian.

MARIE

(Sincere.) I am Mama.

ALMA  
Well good. (Pause.) Marie I want to talk to you.

MARIE

(Mock surprise.) You do?

(ALMA gives her that look that all mothers give their daughters when they have had just about enough.)

MARIE

(Sobering.) Bout what?

ALMA

(Short pause.) Them college classes start nex' month.

MARIE

I know they do Mama.

ALMA

Well?

MARIE

Well what?

ALMA

Have you decided what you gone do?

MARIE

When?

ALMA

(Exasperated.) Nex' month when those classes start!

MARIE

(Short pause.) Naw, I ain't decided....but I thank I'm gone be busy.

ALMA

Busy?

MARIE

Yes, busy.

ALMA

Doin' what?

MARIE

(Pause.) Workin' for the movement.

ALMA

(Pause.) What movement?

MARIE

You know very well what movement.

ALMA

I only know bout one movement and I know you ain't talkin' bout that one....I know you ain't talkin' seriously bout joinin' that one, so jus tell me what one you is talkin' bout.

MARIE

Now Mama don't git upset....

ALMA

(Almost yelling.) I ain't gittin upset. I jus wanna know what you talkin' bout. What movement?

MARIE

(Pause.) The one for equal rights for coloreds.

ALMA

(Pause, then whispers.) Oh Jesus....

MARIE

Now Mama....

ALMA

Oh Jesus not again....

MARIE

Now Mama I know....

ALMA

(Interrupts.) You don't know nuthin Marie.

MARIE

(Defiant.) Well you asked me what I was gone be doin'.

ALMA

Well Lord knows I didn't want you to say that!

MARIE

Well I don' know what you was expectin' me to say....

ALMA

(Interrupts.) I was expectin'....I was hopin' that you'd say you was goin to college so you could get yo degree and be a teacher like we planned it. Ain't that what we planned Marie? Ain't that what you said you was gone do?

MARIE

I changed my mind.

ALMA

You ain't got no mind if you listnin' to that foolishness.

MARIE

It's not foolishness, Mama, and if you'd lissen to some of what they talk about....

ALMA

(Interrupts.) I know what they talkin' bout and it's gone lead to trouble. You mark my words, Marie.

MARIE

What trouble Mama? All we doin' is tryin' to make thangs bettuh for the....

ALMA

(Interrupts.) Make thangs bettuh?

MARIE

Yes, Mama, make thangs bettuh for....

ALMA

(Interrupts.) Y'all ain't gone do nuthin but make thangs worse. A colored person has a hard enuf time jus tryin' to survive in this here evil world, and the lass thang we need is for sum upstart crazy young chirrun such as yoself and yo friends in the "movement" to start stirrin' thangs up.

MARIE

But don' you see Mama? That's just it....

ALMA

(Interrupts.) I sees quite clearly thank you, and what I sees is a buncha young colored chirrun what don' know the first thang bout livin' gone try and tell me and evuhbody else that with a lil conversation with the white man we can all have a bettuh life.

MARIE

But we can!

ALMA

Girl is you crazy? No white man in his right mind gone  
lissen to you or any other colored person talkin' bout  
what they want.

MARIE

They have to lissen....

ALMA

(Interrupts.) Have to? How you gone use white man and have  
to in the same breath? Bout the only thang a white man  
got to do is stay white and die, and that's bout the only  
thang he gone do when it come down to makin' a change for  
the coloreds.

MARIE

You don' know that Mama.

ALMA

I know a whole lot more than you thank I do.

MARIE

(Defiant.) Naw, you don't.

ALMA

Well I guess now you gone tell me what I do know....and I  
guess you gone try and tell me you know more.

MARIE

It's not that I know more. It's jus that I have a differen'  
understandin' of thangs.

ALMA

Don' seem to me you got no understandin' of nuthin.

MARIE

But I do Mama. I ain't under the impression that we can  
jus go and tell the man what we want and he gone say all  
right y'all can have it. I know it's gone take more'n  
that. But don' you thank we got to give the man credit  
for sumthin? Don' you at lease thank the man will lissen  
to us and see that what we talkin' bout is the right way?

ALMA

Marie is you crazy?

MARIE

Huh?

ALMA

I asked you was you crazy?

MARIE

Naw, not to my knowlige....

ALMA

Well yo knowlige bout ain't too good no way....

MARIE

What's the point Mama?

ALMA

The point is you don' know nuthin. You are a chile, and up until this very moment I didn' understand how much of a chile you still is. If you or yo friends in that so called "movement" thank y'all gone git a white man, woman, or chile to lissen to anythang y'all got to say, y'all got another thank comin'. This gone brang trouble Marie. This ain't gone brang nuthin but trouble, and I don' want you to have nuthin more to do with this.

MARIE

What?

ALMA

You heard me Marie. I want you out of this movement stuff right now. You don' know what you doin' and what you gittin' yoself into, and I want you out of it befo it's too late.

MARIE

Mama you ain't got nuthin to worry bout. There ain't gone be no trouble 'cause we don' want none and we ain't tryin' to make none.

ALMA

Africans didn' want to be slaves neither, but that ain't stop the white man from makin'em.

MARIE

Mama what you talkin' bout?

ALMA

Baby jus 'cause y'all don' want no trouble don' mean it ain't gone be no trouble. And y'all go talkin' to a white man bout what y'all want changed in his system, there's gone be some trouble.

MARIE

Stop worryin' Mama.

ALMA

I cain't stop Marie til I know you gone let this thang alone. Jus tell me....please Marie....jus tell me you gone forgit bout this, and you gone quit hangin' round them people okay? (Pause.) Remember what we planned Marie? You and me was gonna work til we had the money to send you away....up to that school for young colored girls. Up north, remember? And you was gone git yo degree and make sumthin of yoself, so's you wudn't haveta be bothered wid all this. Remember that Marie? You said that's what you wanted and we agreed that's what we was gone do. Don'chu want that no more? Don'chu wanna be safe chile? Do you understand Marie? You can be safe up there....okay Marie? Okay baby?

MARIE

(Pause.) I'm not quittin' the movement Mama, 'cause I believe in it, and what it stands for.

ALMA

(Desperate.) Marie please! Don'chu see? It stands for trouble! It only means trouble!

MARIE

No it don't Mama. It stands for a bettuh way of life for Negroes.

ALMA

What?

MARIE

I said it stands for a bettuh way of life for Negroes.

ALMA

Negroes?

MARIE

Yes....Negroes.

ALMA

So y'all even want to change what the man calls us.

MARIE

What's wrong with that?

ALMA

Nuthin....'cept for as long as I can remember we been called "colored" and it didn' seem to bother nobody....seein' as how it was much bettuh than bein' called nigger.

MARIE

Well, we feel that as a race we should be considered Negroes.

ALMA

Y'all do?

MARIE

Yes Mama, we do.

ALMA

So y'all gone apply for a name change, huh? Tell me Marie, what else y'all want changed that y'all thank anybody gone be willin' to lissen to?

MARIE

(Hopeful.) Do you really want to know Mama?

ALMA

What I really want is for you to stop this....to get out.... to get away....befo it's too late.

MARIE

Cain't you even lissen to me Mama? Maybe if you lissened you could know what I know....you could understand....

ALMA

(Starting to sound defeated.) Go ahead Marie.

MARIE

Will you lissen, really Mama? Really?

ALMA

Talk chile.

MARIE

(Pause.) Okay. (Pause.) You see Mama, we believe that if we're given the chance, we Negroes can be jus as smart as the nex' man....

ALMA

(Interrupts.) You mean the nex' white man.

MARIE

Well, not jus the white man, but any other color man. I mean, why cain't we all go to school and other places and learn along side each other?

ALMA

Is you serious?

MARIE

Of course I'm serious.

ALMA

(Pause.) Gone on....what else y'all want?

MARIE

Well, we also believe that this idea of separate but equal, I mean segregation....ain't fair....

ALMA

(Interrupts.) Ain't fair?

MARIE

Right....(Pause.)

ALMA

Gone on....I'm sure this gits bettuh.

MARIE

Mama don' be that away.

ALMA

What else Marie....gone on an' tell me what else while I still got the patience to lissen.

MARIE

(Pause.) Well, there's also bettuh jobs to be had....

ALMA

(Interrupts.) By who?

MARIE

By Negroes.

ALMA

Oh God....

MARIE

(Shocked.) Mama! You nevuh take the Lord's name in vain and this the second time you've done it today.

ALMA

T'ain't nevuh had no reason to til now.

MARIE

I ain't gave you no reason....

ALMA

(Interrupts.) Yes you have....you and all this here nonsense you talkin'.

MARIE

It's not nonsense....

ALMA

(Furious.) It is nonsense....it's ridiculous nonsense. What the hell make you thank you an' yo friends gone walk into a white man's office, tell him this bullshit, and walk out alive?

MARIE

(Shocked.) Mama....I've nevuh heard you talk this way....

ALMA

I ain't nevuh had no reason to til now. Marie, I honestly believe that you done loss yo mind. You sit here talkin' bout changin' a system that's done been in 'fect since long fore I can remember, since befo my own Mama was alive.

MARIE

But Mama....

ALMA

(Interrupts.) Don't but Mama me gal 'cause you don' know what you talkin' bout and I don' wanna hear no more. (Pause in which she tries to regain her calm.) Let me tell you sumthin Marie....The white man has always been on top....you hear me? Always. This is his world, always has been and always will be til the Lord say differen'. I don' care what you want, what yo friends want, what I want, what yo "movement" want....ain't nuthin in this world gone change til the white man say he ready or til the Lord say He ready. And I can tell you right now that ain't nobody ready to hear what y'all got to say. Now you sit here and tell me that I don' know what's gone happen, but I ain't no fool Marie, I know....and you go and tell a white man you want to go to his school wid his chirrun, his system ain't fair, you want his job, and on top all that you want to be called sumthin differen', there's gone be some trouble. He gone laff at you first, then he gone tell you to git outta his

face. Then y'all gone try agin, and he ain't gone thank it's so funny no more and gone tell you agin to git outta his face, nigger. Then jus like niggers is want to do, y'all gone show ya color and all hell gone break loose. (Long pause.) The scripture say "Wait on the Lord," and I'm tellin' you, y'all bettuh wait, cause the Lord ain't in this....the Lord ain't with y'all.

MARIE

(Long pause, then quietly.) You cain't make me believe that God want us to live like this.

ALMA

Live like what? Ain't you happy with what you got?

MARIE

It's not that I ain't happy Mama....it's jus that we oughta be able to have more....why the whites got to have it all and we don' get nuthin?

ALMA

I done told you why....'cause it's their world.

MARIE

Naw it ain't. Your Bible don' say that do it?

ALMA

So now you gone quote scripture to me too? Now you gone tell me what the book say?

MARIE

I'm jus askin' if it say that the world belong to the white man, and if it don' say that then why cain't we have no more than what we got?

ALMA

The thangs of this world don' mean nuthin Marie. "One thang have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to enquire in his temple."

MARIE

(Interrupts.) Right now you dwellin' in a one room project and that's where we been dwellin' for as long as I can remember....

ALMA

Marie!

MARIE

(Continuing.)....and I don' see no beauty in this here old worn furniture with all this lacy stuff on it what's a hand-me-down from the woman you work for, who jus also happins to be the woman you grew up with....

ALMA

Now Marie....

MARIE

(Continuing.)....and I don' know what kinda God it is what don' believe it's okay for me to have as gooda education as the nex' person....

ALMA

Marie!

MARIE

(Continuing.)....and I don' see why I cain't be called whatevuh in the hell I wanna be called whenevuh in hell I wanna be called it....

ALMA

Marie don'chu....

MARIE

(Continuing.)....and jus how in the hell long am me and evuhbody else s'posed to wait on this Lord of yours anyway, or is he jus waitin' on us? Huh? Did you ever thank about that Mama? Did you ever stop to thank that maybe God is waitin' on us to move?

ALMA

That ain't what the Bible say and you know it.

MARIE

I don't know it.

ALMA

You do know it whether you want to accept it or not. The Bible say for you to wait and to seek the Lord's face.... not go out and do whatevuh you thank is right, and I'm tellin' you now like I done told you befo, if'n you don't wait like the Lord say, it gone brang trouble. Now that's all I got to say bout this thang Marie. You git outta it 'cause you don' know what you doin' and I don' want you to have no part of it. (Pause.) You hear me? (Pause.) Do you hear me Marie?

MARIE

I hear you, but you may as well hear me too....I will not give up on the movement.

ALMA

(Long pause.) Well....

MARIE

(Interrupts.) I won't Mama.

ALMA

(Long pause, then quietly.) You could get killed Marie.

MARIE

Don' be ridiculous Mama. Ain't nobody gone git killed ovuh sumthin like this.

ALMA

People been killed ovuh much less.

MARIE

Well ain't nuthin gone happen to me.

ALMA

(Quietly.) That's what yo father said.

MARIE

(Shocked. Long pause.) What?

ALMA

That's what yo father said.

MARIE

What you mean that's what my father said?

ALMA

You heard me.

MARIE

Yeah I heard you Mama, but what you talkin' bout?

ALMA

Yo father.

MARIE

Well why? You told me long time ago that the subject of my daddy was off limits.

ALMA

And I meant it.

MARIE

Then why you brangin' him up now?

ALMA

Cause you need to know bout yo "movement."

MARIE

I know bout my movement and I don' see what my daddy got to do with it at all.

ALMA

He got plenty to do with it and befo you decide you gone stay with this thang....

MARIE

(Interrupts.) I done all ready decided that I'm stayin' with this thang.

ALMA

(Continuing.)....then you need to know bout yo father.

MARIE

I all ready know bout my father.

ALMA

But you don' know the truth.

MARIE

The truth?

ALMA

Yes Marie....the truth.

MARIE

(Sighs.) Mama I all ready know the truth.

ALMA

You don' know nuthin Marie.

MARIE

(Defiant.) Well I know what you told me and I assumed you was tellin' me the truth at the time. What is it Mama? You got another truth to tell?

ALMA

Hush Marie and listen.

MARIE

To what Mama? I know the story all ready. You was pregnant, he lef you, and he didn' come back, ever. You was all alone and had to fend for me and yoself and you won't nevuh forgive him for doin' that to you. You see Mama? I know the whole story all ready, so what could he possibly have to do....

ALMA

(Quietly, as if she hadn't heard Marie speak.) Tweeny-two years ago, yo father walked out the front door. "Don' worry Alma," that's what he said...."Don' worry baby. We jus gone go down there to talk to the man. Evuhtang gone be all right, y'all see. Ain't nuthin gone happen to me...." They was five of 'em in the group....was gone go talk to the man 'bout votin', increasin' wages, other thangs they said. (Pause.) Nex' day, found one in the field, swangin' by his neck, tongue cut out....found one on his back porch, burned almost to ash....'nother one, his name was Paul.... he was a good boy too, and his Mama loved him....found him in the ditch, they'd done beat him senseless and he wudn't stop cryin'....seem like he cudn't stop....jus cryin', cryin', cryin'....ain't find no more....and yo daddy ain't come home yet.

MARIE

(Long pause. She is shaken and uncertain.) Why....what.... what you talkin' bout Mama?

ALMA

They didn' even brang his body back....they coulda at lease brought him back home to me....

MARIE

Oh God....Mama....not my daddy....not....

ALMA

They coulda done that.

MARIE

Oh Mama....

ALMA

(Snapping out of her remembrance.) You see Marie? It ain't no game for us, but it is for them. They kill people.... like animals....to teach us a lesson....and they keep killin' til we learn how to play right....by they rules.

MARIE

(Refusing to believe.) No Mama. This ain't true. Ain't none of what you said true.

ALMA

Yes it is Marie.

MARIE

Naw. It cain't be. People don't do that to other people. Why you tellin' me this?

ALMA

Cause it's what white people do to coloreds.

MARIE

I don't believe you.

ALMA

What don'chu believe Marie? That I would tell you such a thang or that such a thang could happen?

MARIE

(Confused.) I....I don' know. But you cain't be tellin' the truth Mama. That kinda stuff don' really happen.

ALMA

(Pause.) Then you ask Flora Mae. You run upstairs and you ask Flora Mae why one of her boys in the pentaintry.... then you ask her bout her youngest boy....ask her if he evuh stopped cryin'.

MARIE

Oh Mama....not Miss Flora....

ALMA

Yes Miss Flora's boy and yo daddy. And that's what white people do when you start talkin' bout change. That's what they do to shut you up.

MARIE

But you didn' nevuh tell me. You let me believe....

ALMA

(Interrupts.) I ain't nevuh had no reason to tell you. I let you believe he lef us cause that was the easiest thang to believe. You see that fo yoself now. I didn' want you to know he loss his life for no reason. Had I known you was gone get involved with this foolishness I'da told you long time ago.

MARIE

But Mama....

ALMA

No buts Marie. I done told you and I don' want to talk about it no more. I jus want you to realize what you been talkin' bout is crazy and if you keep it up you and yo movement gone get killed.

MARIE

(Long pause.) How do I know you tellin' the truth this time?

ALMA

Don't question me Marie!

MARIE

Well how do I know Mama? How do I know you ain't makin' this all up?

ALMA

I done had jus about enuf of you Marie....

MARIE

Well Mama....

ALMA

(Exploding.) Goddammit Marie!

MARIE

Mama!

ALMA

Stop it....just stop it! I didn' lie to you, you hear me? I didn' lie to you this time. (Trying to regain control.) Now I'm sorry bout yo daddy....and I'm sorry bout Miss Flora and her boys, but what happened to them was they own fault. Now stop botherin' me Marie, cause I cain't take no more of this, you hear? I cain't take no more.

MARIE

I'm sorry too Mama. (Long pause.)....cause I thank it's worth dying for too.

(ALMA is genuinely shocked.)

MARIE

We got to stop playin' by they rules.

ALMA

Marie....

MARIE

(Continuing.) My daddy knew that....Miss Flora's boys knew that....and deep down inside, you got to know that too.

ALMA

(Scared.) Marie you can't....

MARIE

(Gaining courage.) No Mama.

ALMA

(Desperate.) You don't understand....

MARIE

(Defiant.) No! I won't play anymore Mama! We will fight them and we'll beat them. We gonna win this game Mama!

ALMA

You cain't win this baby. It ain't no game for us. This is life for us.

MARIE

Then I will fight for my life.

ALMA

Marie you can't!

MARIE

I have no choice. Don'chu see Mama? I have no choice. I got to fight if I want to live.

ALMA

But if you fight you won't live. They'll take you away Marie. They'll take you away and destroy you, bit by bit. They'll destroy you....and destroy me.

(Long pause in which the two stare at each other, and ALMA realizes she has lost. MARIE goes into the "bedroom" and we hear the sounds of her getting ready to leave. ALMA sits in the rocking chair and holds the rag doll. After a time MARIE reenters the main room, apparently on her way out.)

ALMA

(Quietly.) Where you goin'?

MARIE

(Anger, defiance, and fear in her voice.) There's a rally tonight at the civic center. We tryin' to drum up support for the march nex' month. We gone have a coupla speakers and two guest choirs gone be there. We plan to raise enuf money so we can send for Dr. King or one of his followers like Rev. Jackson to come lead our march. We know if we git one of them, then the people gone have to take us seriously.

ALMA

(Begging.) Marie please....please....

MARIE

(Continuing.) Maybe you ought to come....and understand.  
(She heads for the door.)

ALMA

(Defeated.) I love you Marie.

MARIE

(Thrown off balance.) I....I....um....I love you too Mama. Don' worry, okay Mama? Everythang gonna be all right, I promise....ain't nuthin gonna happen to me....I promise. (She kisses ALMA, then goes to the door. She looks back at ALMA, suddenly realizing what she has just said. She starts to speak, then stops. ALMA does not turn around. MARIE goes out the door.)

(ALMA continues to rock and hold the rag doll. She starts to hum, very quietly at first, but gradually getting louder. The louder the hum, the more roughly she handles the doll. LIGHTS begin to fade. Soon the hum becomes a scream and ALMA begins to tear the doll apart. BLACKOUT. End scene.)

Scene 2

Later that same night, about 11:00. Alma is in the main room, pacing. She is nervous, anxious, agitated, worried, and all of this shows in her facial expression and her movements. She turns on the radio, sits. She goes to turn off the radio, sits. She notices the rag doll on the floor torn almost in two. She stares at it, horrified. She picks it up, and starts to put it back together. She searches for needle and thread.

ALMA

(Searching.) Gotta find some....cain't let her see this....thank I'm crazy or sumthin....Oh Lord where is that needle. (She finds needle and thread and sits in rocker.) Thank you Jesus....let me git this done fore she come home.... (Hums.) Lord, brang my child home....please Father.... (Hums.) She probly all right....jus stayin' out late to spite....uh-huh, she jus stayin' out late to spite....thank I'm gone be worried....well, I ain't....show her....(Hums.) Shouldn'ta told her bout that man....shouldn'ta done that.... maybe she ain't like him though....maybe she gone be back, maybe she....(Starts to cry.) Oh Father please....(She goes to the kitchen, dropping the doll on the floor; she starts to make coffee in an attempt to stop crying.) I got to stop this....she might want some of this when she come home....be ready when she git here....good, strong, and hot....jus like she like it....(Hums.) When she git home. (Hums.)

(MARIE enters. She is soaking wet from head to toe; she is barefoot, out of breath, panting. She slams the door and ALMA immediately reacts, letting out a little yell. ALMA runs into the main room, talking almost nonstop until she sees the state of MARIE.)

ALMA

Marie? Marie is that you? Good God girl you had me worried to death! You know I was gone be worried, and I don't know why you didn't at leases come back fore you went....Oh my God....

(MARIE starts to cry.)

ALMA

Oh my God what they done done to you....Oh my God....come here Marie....no wait, stay there whiles I go get you a blanket or sumthin to put on ya fore you be sick....wait chile....(She goes to bedroom to get a blanket.)

(MARIE stands in the same place, crying.)

ALMA

(Returning with blanket.) Here chile, come here fore you catch cold....my God. What happined Marie? Who done this to you?

(MARIE still does not move.)

ALMA

Oh my God....(She goes to Marie.)

(MARIE lets out a small scream when ALMA touches her. ALMA hushes her, puts the blanket around her, and finally leads her to the sofa to sit.)

ALMA

Hush chile....I gotcha now....hush....it gone be all right. Hush Marie....hush....

(MARIE continues to cry and ALMA continues to soothe her. Finally Marie stops crying. There is silence for awhile.)

ALMA

You all right now?

MARIE

They were everywhere Mama....everywhere....dogs....men.... dogs barking at us like they wanted to kill....people was screamin'....askin' that man to please stop....and he wouldn'....he wouldn' stop beatin'....and that barkin'.... them dogs....and they set a fire Mama....sumbody set a fire to the buildin' and there was a scream and smoke.... and smoke was everywhere....and there was a fire....and the hoses....water....wasn' for the fire....there was hoses.... and that man turn the hose on us....like we was burnin'....

and they let the buildin' burn and they hosed us with.... and the....and it was cold....and I was fallin'....and, and I couldn' git up and I ask him please to stop and he put more on me and my head....my head....I was fallin' and my head was on the ground and he stepped on me....my head.... and I ask him please....and I couldn' run....and I tried to run....and I and ....I couldn'....and it....it was so cold....and they....they put water....

ALMA

Hush Marie....

MARIE

(Continuing.)....stupid; he said....stupid nigger....he said....that's what he called me Mama....that's what he called me....and they was gone teach us a lesson....teach us some respect....stupid....

ALMA

Hush Marie baby....it's ovuh now....hush....

MARIE

It ain't ovuh Mama....it ain't ovuh....they still there.... all of um still there....but I ran....

ALMA

And you got away baby and that's all that mattuh....you got away Marie and you safe now.

MARIE

I ain't safe....ain't none of us safe long as they out there.

ALMA

Then we send you away like we planned....you can go up north to school and forgit this happened.

MARIE

I cain't nevuh forgit what he said....what he did....what they did to us....and we wudn't doin' nuthin.

ALMA

You can forgit if you not around here baby....you can forgit in time.

MARIE

I don' have time to forgit....

ALMA

Yes you do....

MARIE

(Shouts.) No I don't!

ALMA

Marie!

MARIE

He hit me Mama! He hit me! He put his white face in mine and he hit me! He called me stupid Mama! You stupid ass nigger gal! That's what he said to me Mama! What gives him that right? Who gave him the right to touch me? To hit? To laugh at me? To call me names to my face? Who is he to do that to me?

ALMA

Marie calm down....

MARIE

No Mama I cain't! I cain't calm down! I cain't let them do this to me, to us! I cain't let them keep doin' this!

ALMA

Well what you thank you gone do? I told you how they was didn' I Marie? Didn' I tell you what was gone happen? You lucky you got out alive. And for all yo troubles did you change anythang? Naw! Is anythang evuh gone be changed? Naw! Don'chusee gal that there ain't nuthin y'all can do, nuthin but wait?

MARIE

I cain't Mama!

ALMA

You got to Marie! You ain't got no choice!

MARIE

I do have a choice Mama.

ALMA

No you don't chile.

MARIE

Yes I do Mama. (Pause.) I'm goin' back.

ALMA

What?

MARIE

I'm goin' back Mama, and I'm gonna fight for what I know is right, jus like my daddy did, jus like all them I ran and lef behind.

ALMA

Yo daddy made the wrong choice Marie, and so is all those other ones. You all ready made that one but you was lucky this time. You thank you gone be lucky agin? Make the right decision Marie. Stay here....wait....and by mornin this'll all be ovuh with. Don' be no fool like yo daddy was.

MARIE

He wasn' no fool Mama. He made the only choice, the only one he could live with.

ALMA

He ain't alive.

MARIE

You don' know that.

ALMA

Then where is he?

MARIE

I don' know, and it don' matter no how, cause if he's dead he died for me Mama. (Pause.) No Mama. I ain't runnun' from this. I ain't runnun' and I ain't gonna wait. I'm goin' back to fight cause it's the only thang I can do.... it's the only way I can live. (She heads for the door.)

ALMA

(Desperate.) Marie! Wait a minit! You cain't go out there like that. Yo clothes is wet and you can catch yo death like that!

MARIE

And do you thank dry clothes gone make a difference?

(Long pause in which they stare at each other.)

ALMA

If I told you that story bout yo father was a lie.... would that make a difference?

(Long pause.)

MARIE

I love you Mama....don' worry....evuhthang gone be all right....y'all see....ain't nuthin gone happen to me....  
(She walks out the door.)

(ALMA stares at the closed door for a long while. When she turns away she sees the rag doll on the floor. She picks up the half-sewn doll and begins to tear it apart, very slowly, humming all the while. Slow fade to BLACKOUT. The End.)

When the Cock Crows

## PREFACE

To say the 1960's was a turbulent time is an understatement. The Civil Rights Movement was no longer the non-violent protest of a people in search of equality. Instead it had become a war, and violence had become a way of life.

The white man's overriding question of the time was, "What does the Negro want?" After all, certain concessions had been made: segregation was on the decline and integration on the rise; there was a small, but definite black middle class; blacks were holding prominent positions in state and national government. Surely this should have been enough to satisfy the race that reform was indeed progressing. But the Negro's response was less than grateful; the race demanded equality in all aspects of American life, and militants were prepared to fight for that equality. Reverse racism was no longer the ideology of a select few. With the assassinations of Malcolm X and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., it became the dominant train of thought for most blacks. People of all races began to realize that non-violent protest would no longer bring about change in America, especially not the changes that blacks wanted now. For there was more at stake than voting rights and drinking fountains. The Movement of the

1960's was for better housing, employment, education, and government. The Movement of the 1960's was for power--Black Power.

The idea of waiting for change was out; the idea of fighting for change was in. And the black woman was there fighting for her family, for her race. She fought in the churches, praying for those who had died, and raising funds for those who were still fighting. She fought in the schools, busing her children to white institutions so that her black child would grow up as smart as any white child. She fought in the work-force, striving for the same job as the white applicant, and raising a protest if discriminated against. She fought in the home, raising her children, often alone, to understand that the struggle was right, racism was wrong, and to be black was to be beautiful.

When the Cock Crows is the story of a daughter raised by such a mother. The play attempts to depict the personal conflict of a young woman torn between what her mother expects of her, what the Black race expects of her, what the white race expects of her, and what she wants for herself. Dailee is even more confused in that she is not sure what she wants for herself and does not know how to go about finding out. The play focuses on one woman, but it attempts to show the product of one race struggling

to liberate itself from the long time oppression of another.

### Characters

Dailee--a young black woman in her early twenties; a college student

Brenda--a young white woman in her early twenties; a college student; Dailee's roommate

### Setting

A dorm room. A twin bed is on each side of the room and a trunk is at the foot of each bed. A chest of drawers and a full-length mirror is on one wall and there is also a window above a small table holding a telephone. A small stand holds a record player and some records.

Posters of Jimmy Hendrix, Janis Joplin, the Supremes, and other artists cover the walls. Also on the wall is a very large peace sign, a flag of the African nation, and various slogans of the period, such as "Black is Beautiful," "Make Love not War," etc.

There are two doors--one leads to a bathroom, the other leads to the hallway.

### Time

The play takes place from late afternoon to late night of one day. It is August, the late 1960's, New York, NY.

Scene 1

Late afternoon. Dailee is on one of the beds, surrounded by books, studying. She gets up, stretches, walks around the room, straightens things, lets out a long sigh, then sits back down to start studying again. Brenda enters, flushed, excited, and obviously ready to talk.

BRENDA

Hi Dailee!

DAILEE

Hi.

BRENDA

How can you sit inside on such a wonderful day as this?

DAILEE

Well, in case you hadn't noticed, I'm studying.

BRENDA

Well I can see that, but why?

DAILEE

Because I have a test tomorrow.

BRENDA

So why don't you study outside?

DAILEE

Because I'm studying inside.

BRENDA

But why?

DAILEE

Because I have a test tomorrow.

BRENDA

But it's such a beautiful day.

DAILEE

Then maybe you should go outside and enjoy it.

BRENDA

Well maybe I will.

DAILEE

Well good for you.

BRENDA

(Pause.) Wanna come?

DAILEE

No.

BRENDA

Why not?

DAILEE

(Shouts.) Because I have a test tomorrow!

BRENDA

Well you don't have to yell.

DAILEE

Well you don't seem to be getting the picture. I have a test tomorrow, a very important test, and I intend to do well on it, but the only way I can do well is if I study, and the only way I can study, with no distractions, is to stay inside this room. Do you understand now?

BRENDA

Well don't be so testy. (Pause.) I don't see why you're so worried anyhow. You're not going to flunk....you never flunk.

DAILEE

(Mumbles.) Unlike some people.

BRENDA

What'd you say?

DAILEE

I said I don't intend to flunk.

BRENDA

Well you're not going to....you always do well on your tests.

DAILEE

That's because I study.

BRENDA

I know....you always study. In fact, that's all you ever do. Don't you realize there's more to life?

DAILEE

Yes I realize there's more to life, but I also realize that if I intend to get more later, I have to study now.

BRENDA

What do you mean "get more later?" You should live for the moment Dailee, just like I do.

DAILEE

At the moment you don't have much of a g.p.a. do you?

BRENDA

That's all beside the point.

DAILEE

I'm sure.

BRENDA

Well it is. At least I can say that I'm happy. Can you say that?

DAILEE

(Speaking slowly.) I'm....happy.

BRENDA

Oh be serious Dailee.

DAILEE

That's exactly what I was doing before you arrived. I was being very serious about studying for a test.

BRENDA

Yes but that's no fun.

DAILEE

I didn't say it was fun....I said it was serious. There is a difference. (Sarcastically.) Can you say "difference?"

BRENDA

Ha, ha, very funny. I know there's a difference between having fun and being serious, but you never seem to have any time for fun. You're always being serious about something. I guess I just worry about you, that's all.

DAILEE

Well that's very sweet of you but you don't have to worry about me. I'm fine. Now if you don't mind, I'd like to get back to this. (Indicates books.)

BRENDA

Okay, okay. Don't mind me. I'll be quiet as a mouse.  
(Picks up a book, tries to read. Puts book down, looks around room, begins to hum, absentmindedly.)

DAILEE

(Tries to ignore humming. Eventually cannot stand it any longer.) Brenda!

BRENDA

(Genuinely startled.) What?

DAILEE

Would you stop that noise?

BRENDA

(Still shaken.) What noise? God girl, you scared me to death!

DAILEE

Brenda look. I want to study....I have to study, okay?  
Would you just let me do that? Please?

BRENDA

Well what are you talking about? I was letting you study.  
I was sitting here minding my ownself business, and you just let out a yell for no reason.

DAILEE

You were humming.

BRENDA

I was not!

DAILEE

Yes you were!

BRENDA

No I wasn't!

DAILEE

(Giving in.) Okay fine....you weren't.

BRENDA

You see? You see there? You have to admit it....you yelled at me for nothing.

DAILEE

That's right Brenda, I yelled at you for no reason at all.

BRENDA

You see? You're just frustrated. You need to get out of this room, into the bright sunshine. You need to go out and explore....there's a whole world out there just waiting for you and....

DAILEE

(Interrupts.) Okay Brenda, what is it?

BRENDA

What do you mean what is it?

DAILEE

Just what I said....what is it?

BRENDA

Well I have no idea what....

DAILEE

(Interrupts.) Yes you do. Whenever you start with that bright brave new world speech it means you have something on your mind....something you want my opinion on....something you've gotten yourself into.

BRENDA

Well now that's just not true!

DAILEE

Sure it is, so let me think....now what could it be this time?

BRENDA

This time?

DAILEE

, Yes this time. Let's see....last time you were running for president of the student body, even though your g.p.a. was and still is about two points below the requirement.

BRENDA

What?

DAILEE

(Continuing.) And the time before that you were going to join the protest against the war, but you weren't quite sure what to wear....

BRENDA

Dailee!

DAILEE

(Continuing.) And the time before that you'd decided to become an official member of the "Flowerchildren," even though you're allergic to flowers....

BRENDA

Dailee!

DAILEE

(Continuing.) And the time before that....

BRENDA

(Interrupts.) I will not listen to anymore of this!

DAILEE

The truth hurts, huh?

BRENDA

Those were all lies and you know it.

DAILEE

Uh-huh, sure they were....you and I both know the real truth, don't we?

BRENDA

I know the real truth. You seem to have no idea what the word means.

DAILEE

My, my....I seem to have struck a nerve.

BRENDA

You most certainly did not.

DAILEE

Well if I did, and if I hurt your feelings in the process, I apologize. (Pause.) Do you accept?

BRENDA

Maybe.

DAILEE

That's good.

BRENDA

I just said maybe.

DAILEE

Uh-huh, that's good enough. (Pause.) So, are you going to tell me what you've gotten yourself into now?

BRENDA

Well....

DAILEE

(Pause.) Well?

BRENDA

(Pause.) Well....let me explain it this way.

DAILEE

(Pause.) Whenever you want to start....after all, I have nothing else to do....no tests to study for or anything like that....so just take your time....

BRENDA

(Interrupts.) Oh all right, all right, all right. (Pause.) You see, I went to this rally today.

DAILEE

Which one?

BRENDA

That doesn't matter right now. Anyway, I went to this rally today, and I was really inspired by what these people had to say.

DAILEE

And what is it that these people had to say that inspired you so much?

BRENDA

Well, they were talking about equality among the races, and power....I mean how there was a certain kind of power that every person had.

DAILEE

Uh-huh, and what else?

BRENDA

Well they were saying how each individual could use that power for the betterment of society....

DAILEE

(Interrupts.) The betterment of society?

BRENDA

Yeah, you know like there shouldn't be a dominant race, and if there had to be one, why did it have to be the white race....I mean you know, why couldn't it be, say, the black race?

DAILEE  
(Pause.) Uh-huh....what else?

BRENDA  
Well, they were also saying that we shouldn't let ourselves be dominated by anyone, and that if we feel oppressed, we should do something about it.

DAILEE  
Who is this "we?"

BRENDA  
"We" is us.

DAILEE  
Us who?

BRENDA  
Well I don't mean us as in you and me, but us....

DAILEE  
(Interrupts.) But us as in who?

BRENDA  
Well, us as in black people.

DAILEE  
Brenda....you are not black.

BRENDA  
Well I know that!

DAILEE  
Do you? I mean have you realized that?

BRENDA  
Well of course I have! I know I'm not black, but you are.

DAILEE  
(Pause.) I don't think I'm following this conversation.

BRENDA  
Well why not? You're black, right? I mean you follow that part, right?

DAILEE  
Yes, I follow that much.

BRENDA  
Well, don't you get it?

DAILEE

(Pause.) Get what?

BRENDA

Gosh Dailee, do I have to explain everything?

DAILEE

You're going to have to explain this.

BRENDA

Well, you're black, and this guy was saying that the black race has had enough with this oppression bit and that it was time to do something about it, and that all blacks should stand together to stop the oppression and stuff, so I knew he was talking about you so I signed you up as a potential member, I mean not as a member of the black race cause you're all ready a part of that, but since you're a part of that, I mean the black race, then I thought that probably you should be a member of this group too, so I signed you up. (Pause.) Now do you get it?

DAILEE

You signed me up?

BRENDA

Yeah! Isn't that great?

DAILEE

You signed me up for what?

BRENDA

Well, the guy wanted to know if there were people there, I mean at the rally, who might be interested in joining, and I know you weren't there, but I thought you might be interested anyway, so I went ahead and signed you up.

DAILEE

You signed me up for what?

BRENDA

Well I mean you're not an official member or anything, but I just signed the sheet that was for those who might be interested in....

DAILEE

(Interrupts.) You signed me up for what?

BRENDA

Well for the Black Panthers, what else?

DAILEE

(Long pause.) What did you say?

BRENDA

I said I signed you up for the Black Panthers.

DAILEE

(Pause.) Is this a joke?

BRENDA

Well of course it's not. Why would I joke about a thing like this?

DAILEE

I don't believe this.

BRENDA

I know....it's like the chance of a lifetime. I mean do you realize this is a national thing? I mean Dailee, these guys are on the news and stuff and everything. I mean, they're really sorta famous. You might even become famous once you decide to join officially....

DAILEE

(Interrupts.) Are you crazy?

BRENDA

Crazy? Of course not!

DAILEE

Do you realize what you've done?

BRENDA

I didn't do anything. I'm just trying....

DAILEE

(Interrupts.) You're just trying to get me killed, that's all.

BRENDA

Get you killed? What are you talking about? How are you gonna get killed? Calm down....

DAILEE

(Interrupts.) Calm down? You just signed me up with the most well known group of terroists outside the Viet Cong and you want me to calm down?

BRENDA

Terrorists?

DAILEE

Yes Brenda, terrorists.

BRENDA

Oh Dailee, please. They aren't terrorists. They're just a group of people fighting for their rights.

DAILEE

Fighting you say? Let's try killing! Can you say "killing" Brenda? These people kill when they don't get their way!

BRENDA

Oh sometimes things may get out of hand, but they don't actually kill anybody. Surely you know that.

DAILEE

Why do you think they're always on the news Brenda?

BRENDA

Well you can't believe everything you hear on the news. Those people don't know what they're talking about anyway.

DAILEE

Well this is great. I can't believe what I hear on the news, but I should believe what my half-witted roommate says about the great opportunity she's just provided for me.

BRENDA

Right! Don't you see? This is a great opportunity. You'll meet a lot of people, a lot of black people that you probably otherwise wouldn't meet.

DAILEE

These are probably not the kind of people I would want to meet anyway.

BRENDA

Well of course you'd want to meet them. They're black! You always want to meet black people, don't you? I mean I do. They're always so much more fun than other people. I mean they laugh all the time and everything.

DAILEE

I don't believe this.

BRENDA

I'm serious Dailee. I'm sure that black people are happier than anybody else, and they should be.

DAILEE

Should they now?

BRENDA

Well of course! I mean you guys have slogans and stuff and groups you can belong to, and you all know where you came from. That's great.

DAILEE

Is it?

BRENDA

Yeah! I mean white people don't much know anything. We all didn't come from one place, in fact, most of us don't know where we came from. And we're such an impure race. I mean what does it mean to be white? It just means we don't have pigments like you people do. There's only one color white, unless you have a tan or something, but there's lots of colors of black. I mean you could be any color of black you want to be. That's why you guys always say black is beautiful. God, it must be great to be you.

DAILEE

Yeah, it's a real blast.

BRENDA

I bet. (Pause.) God Dailee, I'd give anything to be you.

DAILEE

What?

BRENDA

I said....

DAILEE

(Interrupts.) I know what you said, I just don't believe you said it.

BRENDA

Why not? It's no big deal.

DAILEE

No big deal? Brenda, I think you must have a serious problem.

BRENDA

Why? What did I do?

DAILEE

You seem to be under the impression that being black is a wonderful thing, well let me tell you something.... it's not.

BRENDA

What do you mean it's not?

DAILEE

Just what I said....unless of course you like having people watch your every move, waiting for you to steal something, or waiting for you to lie about something, or waiting for you to break into a song at any minute....It's great to be black until you go to someone's house for dinner and they assume you want fried chicken. It's great until you tell someone you're going home for the weekend and they assume home is a small shack in the heart of Mississippi, where your mama is raising seven kids alone cause your daddy ran off a long time ago. It's great until you make a good grade on an exam and the professor assumes you probably cheated so he decides to give another one on the spot, to see if you can pass again. It's great until every white boy on campus looks at you and makes it obvious that he's undressing you, trying to see the difference between your body and his white girlfriend's. It's great until some white girl who thinks she's your friend asks what's it really like to sleep with a black man, and if "what they say is true," as if you give a damn about "what they say." Yeah Brenda, it's damn great to be black.

BRENDA

(Pause.) Well, I'm sorry.

DAILEE

Yeah. Don't mention it.

BRENDA

I am. I didn't mean to upset you so much.

DAILEE

Just do me a favor from now on, okay?

BRENDA

Okay, what is it?

DAILEE

Don't sign me up for anything anymore....don't tell me how wonderful my existence is anymore....don't do me anymore favors, okay?

BRENDA  
Okay. (Pause.) Um....um....

DAILEE  
What Brenda?

BRENDA  
Well....does this mean that you're not going to be joining the boycott?

DAILEE  
What boycott?

BRENDA  
Maybe I didn't tell you this....

DAILEE  
Tell me what?

BRENDA  
(Pause.) Well, you remember I told you about signing you up for the Panthers, right?

DAILEE  
Tell me what Brenda?

BRENDA  
Well don't get upset....

DAILEE  
I'm all ready upset! Tell me what Brenda?

BRENDA  
Well....the Panthers are gonna boycott Professor Johnson's class, starting tomorrow, because they say he's been making racial slurs against a lot of people, and they're going to see to it that they get him fired, and so they circulated this petition to get names of people who agree that he should lose his job for the "above stated reason," and they're gonna give it to him today and have a sitdown in front of his classroom tomorrow so he'll have to walk through all of them before he can get to his room, and so I thought....

DAILEE  
(Interrupts.) Brenda....just tell me that you didn't put my name on that petition.

BRENDA  
Well....

DAILEE

Dammit Brenda, did you or did you not put my name on that petition?

BRENDA

Well I put my name on it too!

DAILEE

You had no right Brenda....I swear I could kill you for this.

BRENDA

(Trying to joke.) And you say you couldn't be a Panther.

DAILEE

I'm serious Brenda!

BRENDA

Oh Dailee calm down. What is the big deal anyway? If you're so opposed to it then don't go. There's no law that says you have to be a part of the boycott.

DAILEE

There's something you don't seem to understand, dear.

BRENDA

What?

DAILEE

Before you breezed in here with your "good news," I was studying for a test. Well guess what class it's for, and guess what professor. And after you figure that out little brainchild then you tell me just what the hell I'm supposed to do?

BRENDA

(Long pause.) Oh.

DAILEE

Oh? Oh? Is that all you can say? Oh?

BRENDA

Well what do you want me to say?

DAILEE

I want you to tell me just what the hell I'm supposed to do!

BRENDA

Well....

DAILEE

Well what dammit? Just tell me what, and tell me now, because tomorrow morning, I'm going to have to do something, so tell me what? Who do I deny Brenda, or perhaps I should say defy? Who Brenda? Who?

BRENDA

I don't know Dailee....I didn't think....

DAILEE

(Interrupts.) That's right, you didn't think then, so start thinking now.

BRENDA

Well I can't think if you're gonna be yelling and all.

DAILEE

Then leave.

BRENDA

What?

DAILEE

I said leave. Get the hell out. I don't want to hear anymore of your thoughts anyway.

BRENDA

Dailee I'm sorry. I didn't mean....

DAILEE

(Interrupts.) Leave Brenda....get out before I tell you what I really think of you.

BRENDA

(Long pause.) I'm sorry. (Goes to door.) Dailee, I....

DAILEE

(Shouts.) Get the hell out!

(BRENDA exits immediately. DAILEE sits still for a long time. She begins to push the books off the bed, and one by one they hit the floor with a thud. LIGHTS fade to BLACKOUT. End scene.)

Scene 2

Late that night. Dailee is sitting on her bed, staring blankly in front of her. The books are still on the floor where they landed. Brenda enters the room quietly. Dailee does not turn around. Brenda makes noise, moving about the room, obviously trying to get Dailee's attention. Still, Dailee does not turn around.

BRENDA

Okay Dailee, how long do I get the silent treatment?

(DAILEE does not speak. She begins to pick up the books.)

BRENDA

Oh come on Dailee. I said I was sorry. I didn't know you were even in Johnson's class. Had I known that I wouldn't have put your name on the petition. I really am sorry I got you into this mess, and I honestly have been trying to figure out a way to get you out of it. Do you want to know what I came up with? Are you still too mad to talk to me?

DAILEE

Go away Brenda.

BRENDA

Oh come on Dailee, don't be like that. I'm trying to help you.

DAILEE

It's your help that got me into this. I thank you not to offer any more.

BRENDA

Well do you at least accept my apology?

DAILEE

No.

BRENDA

Dailee!

DAILEE

Go away Brenda.

BRENDA

Well just where do you suggest I go? It's the middle of the night, in case you hadn't noticed.

DAILEE

I want you to go to hell Brenda.

BRENDA

What?

DAILEE

You heard me right. I want you to go to hell....since you're so eager to be black.

BRENDA

What are you talking about?

DAILEE

You don't get it do you? You don't get it at all, do you?

BRENDA

Look, I know you're upset....

DAILEE

You don't know anything Brenda. Upset....that doesn't come close to what I feel. You have no idea the position you've put me in.

BRENDA

Yes I do Dailee....

DAILEE

No you don't dammit!

BRENDA

Dailee!

DAILEE

- Shut up! You're just a dumb ass white girl who doesn't know shit about anything.

BRENDA

Hey, wait a minute....

DAILEE

No you wait a minute for a change. Can you understand that Brenda? Can you understand what it means to wait, to have to spend your life waiting until somebody else said it was okay for you to move?

BRENDA

I don't understand what you're talking about.

DAILEE

No of course you don't. You don't understand because you've never had to wait for anything have you? You've always had your way haven't you? You've always gotten everything, haven't you?

BRENDA

Well what makes you think my life has been such a piece of cake?

DAILEE

Because you're a white girl, and that means you own the world.

BRENDA

Oh does it?

DAILEE

Yes.

BRENDA

Well let me tell you something baby. It ain't no easier for me to be white than it is for you to be black.

DAILEE

Oh give me a break.

BRENDA

No you give me a break. You think you got all the problems Dailee? You think it's so bad to be black? Well you oughta try being white for a day.

DAILEE

I would if I had the chance.

BRENDA

Well it ain't all it's cracked up to be. At least you know where you come from. At least people recognize you on the street.

DAILEE

What the hell are you talking about?

BRENDA

What do you hear about white people Dailee? Nothing. What do white people ever do except talk down to everybody, and I do mean everybody. What do white people ever do besides walk around talking about how superior they are to everyone else. You think that's fun Dailee? You think I'm proud to be part of a race that gets off on killing other people? Is that what you want to be a part of? Is it?

DAILEE

That's not what I'm talking about.

BRENDA

Yes it is baby. You become a white person, you take on the history of this nation, an ugly history of oppressing, degrading, dehumanizing everybody who wasn't blond-haired and blue-eyed. Now think about that Dailee.

DAILEE

I have thought about it.

BRENDA

Well you might want to think about it a little more. At least you can be proud of your race. At least you know that you've always fought for your rights....and at least you know that you were right.

DAILEE

(Sarcastically.) Well how sweet. I cry for the pain you've felt, the sleepless nights you've had because of what your race has done to mine.

BRENDA

Don't make fun of me Dailee.

DAILEE

Then don't ridicule me. Don't feed me this bullshit about how tough your life has been because you had so many privileges forced on you. I've spent my whole life fighting for those same things that were given to you.

BRENDA

I know that Dailee.

DAILEE

You don't know shit baby, because if you did, there's no way you would have put my name on anything.

BRENDA

I thought I was doing you a favor. I thought I was helping.

DAILEE

And that's what's wrong with you and your whole race. You always think you doing us a favor, helping us out. Well I don't need or want your favors or your help.

BRENDA

I'm sorry Dailee. I didn't think this would work against you.

DAILEE

What did you think was gonna happen? You know what happens to people when they start raising protests, don't you? One by one they get expelled for some reason or another. One by one they start to disappear from campus. Is that what you think my parents sent me here for? To start raising hell over something that's not right? Don't you think we've known from the start that this world ain't right? You think those Panthers gonna get that man fired? No! They won't, and they know they won't, but they will get publicity, and the sympathy of the world. That's what they want Brenda. That's not what I want.

BRENDA

But I thought....

DAILEE

(Interrupts.) You thought that since I was black I would want the same things every other black person wants. The trouble is you don't know what black people want, and you certainly don't know what I want.

BRENDA

Well what do you want?

DAILEE

To be left alone by you and everybody else.

BRENDA

Well how do you think you gonna accomplish that? You can't hide from everybody Dailee. And when that sun rises, you gonna have a whole crowd to face. What you gonna do then? You gonna have to admit to yourself and everybody else what decision you've made, and it seems to me you only got one choice.

DAILEE

Oh? And what is that?

BRENDA  
(Pause.) If you're really black, you have to boycott.

DAILEE

What?

BRENDA  
I said if you're really black....

DAILEE

What the hell do you mean, if I'm really black?

BRENDA

I meant what I said. You people need to stick together, if you want to make a change. Can't you see that?

DAILEE

(Pause.) I think I'm beginning to see a lot.

BRENDA

Well it's about time.

DAILEE

Yes it is. You want me to boycott, don't you? You want to see me get into trouble don't you? You want to see me thrown out of school, don't you?

BRENDA

I just want to see your race go forward....

DAILEE

You're full of shit.

BRENDA

What?

DAILEE

I said you're full of shit.

BRENDA

I don't know what you're talking about.

DAILEE

I'm not doing it Brenda. I'm not boycotting.

BRENDA

But you have to! You have to fight for your rights!

DAILEE

Not that way.

BRENDA

How can you sit there and say you're not going to boycott?

DAILEE

If you're so concerned about my rights, you boycott Brenda. Are you planning to? You are aren't you?

BRENDA

Well....I'm not in his class.

DAILEE

Neither are most of the Panthers. So you're not planning to?

BRENDA

I just don't see what the point would be.

DAILEE

Exactly.

BRENDA

What do you mean exactly? I don't follow you.

DAILEE

Of course you don't. I'm not doing it.

BRENDA

(Pause.) Well I don't know how you can call yourself black.

DAILEE

But I understand how you can call yourself white.

BRENDA

What is that supposed to mean?

DAILEE

Nothing. I'm going to bed now Brenda. And when I get up in the morning, I'm going to class. And I'm going to walk through the Panthers and I'm going to take my test. And I'm going to pass my test. And then I'm going to walk back through the Panthers and I'm coming back here. Hopefully when I get back, you'll be gone.

BRENDA

Gone?

DAILEE

Yes, gone. Perhaps in search of someone who's more your type.

BRENDA

Well maybe I should leave. If I must have a roommate, and if I must have a black one, I'd at least like to have an authentic one.

DAILEE

You might want to find out what that means first. Better yet, you might want to work on being white--you've almost got it down good.

BRENDA

What the hell is that supposed to mean?

DAILEE

Goodnight Brenda.

BRENDA

I'm talking to you dammit!

DAILEE

I'm through listening. Goodnight.

BRENDA

Well....I'm leaving....now!

DAILEE

Going to find a real black one?

BRENDA

Yes!

DAILEE

Good luck. (Begins to laugh.)

BRENDA

(Grabs purse and heads for the door.) One day you're gonna wake up and realize how to be a good black girl and accept help when its offered to you.

DAILEE

If that's what I have to wake up to, I think I'll stay asleep. Goodnight.

(BRENDA walks out the door and slams it. DAILEE begins to laugh softly, then loudly. LIGHTS begin to fade. The laugh becomes a sob then a very loud cry. BLACKOUT. The End.)

Eventide

## PREFACE

The problems that the black woman faces today are very different from those she faced two decades ago. She no longer has to worry about marches, or protests, or movements as much as she once did. Her grandmothers and mothers have cleared the path of obstacles so that now the black woman can have almost anything she wants, including an education, a well-paying job, and financial security. All her foremothers ask in return is that she not forget from whence she came, and the lives that were given so that hers might be what it is today. But this request is not as simple as it may sound. How does one live in the present, look toward the future, and continue to remember the past? Is it possible to do this on an everyday basis? Should the black woman have to live this way, and if not, should she do so anyway because it is expected of her? This is the new struggle of the black woman; it is a psychological battle that in many respects is just as intense as the physical struggle of her foremothers.

Eventide is the story of a black woman, Rae, who is caught in this psychological battle. She is at the point in her life that all women reach eventually, the point where a serious decision regarding her future must be made. Should she marry, become a statistic, and assimilate with American

culture? And if she does, is this not forgetting her roots? Should she remain single and independent, continuing the work her foremothers began, refusing to become too comfortable with her "freedom?" Why can she not have both? Is it possible to combine the values of the past, present, and future and still be black--and still be accepted as black by her race?

This is the position of the black woman today, earned for her by the struggles of the past. Eventide attempts to portray a young black woman trying to come to terms with this position. The play examines how delicate "freedom" is and how easily it can be lost.

### Characters

Rae--the person; a young black woman in her early twenties

Rae 1--the snide, rather cynical personality of Rae

Rae 2--the sweet, rather naive personality of Rae

### Setting

A large, sparsely furnished studio apartment. The style of the room is contemporary, with lots of chrome, glass, and brass. There is a large window with a window seat. There is an old portable typewriter on a table close to the window, and lots of paper is scattered around the typewriter. A chaise lounge is on one side of the room, and next to it is a telephone with a built-in answering machine on a brass stand. Large pillows are tossed about the room. An entertainment center holding a stereo, television, VCR, and several books lines one wall. One African mask is on each side of the room, and covering the floor is a large piece of colorful African cloth. In one corner is a large rubber tree plant, and hanging directly above it is an overgrown ivy plant.

On one side of the stage is the makings of a kitchen--a small stove, sink, etc. Beyond this is a doorway through which can be seen the semblance of a bed.

At one glance it should be obvious that this is the home of an "artist," a "creative person" who lives and "creates" in the same space.

### Time

The present, in any city in the U.S.

Late night. Rae is in the window seat, writing. Rae 2 is laying among the pillows, asleep. Rae 1 is on the chaise lounge, pretending to be asleep. One SPOT comes up on Rae as she speaks; one SPOT on Rae 1 when she speaks. Lights fade in when Rae 2 wakes up.

RAE

(Reading what she has written.) She sits in windowsills when it's late and stares at the night, and wonders how it happened and why not right, and why it lasted so long and why it felt so good and why things don't always turn out the way she thinks they should....

RAE 1

(Interrupts.) Hey Rae....

RAE

I thought you were asleep for the night.

RAE 1

Naw I ain't sleep....I got to talk to you.

RAE

I don't want to talk, and I don't want to think. I don't want to do anything but write, so go to sleep and leave me alone.

RAE 1

I can't sleep.

RAE

Well that's not my fault.

RAE 1

Yes it is.

RAE

No it's not. I'm not bothering you.

RAE 1

What you're doing is bothering me.

RAE

How? All I'm doing is sitting here, minding my own business, trying to write. Now how is that bothering you?

RAE 1

Because there are other things, more important things, you need to be doing.

RAE

Such as?

RAE 1

(Imitates Rae.) "Such as?" You know very well....

RAE

(Interrupts.) Would you just leave me alone? I've all ready told you I don't feel like thinking about anything....

RAE 1

(Interrupts.) You ain't got no choice girl, you got to think and you got to do it now. You got a decision to make, and its got to be made by morning....and in case you haven't noticed, morning ain't too far away.

RAE

I know that.

RAE 1

Well, what you gone do?

RAE

(Shouts.) I don't know! Leave me alone!

(RAE 2 startled, wakes up.)

RAE 1

(Shouts.) I will not leave you alone till you tell me something!

RAE 2

What is going on?

RAE 1

(To Rae 2.) Shut up and go back to sleep.

RAE 2

Excuse me?

RAE 1

I said shut up and go back to sleep. The last thing we need is for you to start thinking.

RAE

Please don't start this....

RAE 1

(Interrupts.) I ain't starting nothing. I just don't want her to start trying to think.

RAE 2

For your information I've been thinking all my life thank you very much.

RAE 1

Well your past actions have proven otherwise.

RAE 2

My past actions?

RAE 1

Yes your past actions. Damn, Cain't you hear neither?

RAE 1

Please stop....

RAE 2

(Interrupts.) I'm not starting....I just want to know what she means by my past actions. (To Rae 1.) So what about my past actions? And by the way "cain't you hear neither" is a double negative.

RAE 1

Yeah I got your double negative....

RAE

All right stop! That's enough!

RAE 1

Fine!

RAE 2

Fine!

RAE 1

(Long pause, then sarcastically.) Well now, isn't this nice?

RAE

Yes it is. And what would be even nicer is if the two of you would go back to sleep and never wake up again. That way, I could live my own life and make my own decisions.

RAE 2

Well that's not a very nice thing to say.

RAE

I'm not feeling very nice at the moment.

RAE 2

Well why not? What's wrong with you?

RAE

Nothing. I just want to be left alone.

RAE 1

And how do you propose we do that?

RAE 2

Yeah! It's not as if you can live without us!

RAE 1

(To Rae 2.) She could do without you.

RAE 2

No she can't.

RAE 1

Yes she can. The whole world could do without you.

RAE 2

I beg your pardon.

RAE 1

You ain't got to beg baby. I meant what I said. She could do well without you. You're the reason she's in the mess she's in now.

RAE 2

What mess?

RAE 1

This Perry mess.

RAE 2

What are you talking about? She's not in any mess. As a matter of fact, everything is perfect.

RAE 1

Perfect?

RAE 2

Yes, perfect.

RAE 1

I don't believe you.

RAE 2

What don't you believe? Everything is fine.

RAE 1

Fine? How can you say that? Her life is going to hell and you sit there and say everything's....

RAE

(Interrupts.) My life is not going to hell.

RAE 1

How would you know? I swear sometimes (Pointing to Rae 2.) you're as stupid as she is.

RAE 2

I beg your pardon!

RAE 1

I all ready told you that you ain't got to beg.

RAE 2

Well excuse me.

RAE 1

Ain't no excuse for you.

RAE

Would both of you stop it, please?

RAE 2

She started it.

RAE 1

And I'm going to finish it too. Look Rae, you got a decision to make right? So let me help you.

RAE 2

What about me?

RAE 1

You've done enough damage.

RAE 2

What do you mean "damage?" (Bragging.) I'm the one who got her the marriage proposal.

RAE 1

You see what I mean you dumb ass.

RAE

Don't start on him. I do not want to think about him so don't start.

RAE 1

Well I ain't got shit to say about him no way.

RAE 2

That's another double negative.

RAE 1

You know I've had just about enough of you.

RAE 2

You really should work on improving your language.

RAE 1

I'm about to start work on improving your face.

RAE 2

(Backing down.) Okay, okay.

RAE

(Pause.) Well, I'm glad to see the two of you work out your own differences for a change.

RAE 1

We wouldn't have no differences if she'd just grow up.

RAE 2

I am grown up thank you very much.

RAE 1

And I wish you'd quit thanking me for every single thing.

RAE 2

I'll keep that in mind. Anything else?

RAE 1

Yes. Why don't you disappear?

RAE 2

Because I like it here thank you very much.

RAE 1

I told you to stop that!

RAE 2

I forgot....

RAE

That's enough! (Pause.) Why don't the two of you do something constructive.

RAE 2

Like what?

RAE

Like help me with this poem.

RAE 1

That's hardly my idea of being constructive.

RAE

And just what is your idea of being constructive?

RAE 2

When did you start having constructive ideas?

RAE 1

I'm really losing my patience with you.

RAE 2

Well that's just too bad because I'm not going nowhere.

RAE 1

That's a double negative.

RAE 2

Shut up.

(RAE 1 laughs at RAE 2's mistake.)

RAE

Are the two of you going to help me with this poem or not?

RAE 1

Not!

RAE

Fine. Thank you very much.

RAE 1

If one more person thanks me....

RAE 2

(Interrupts, to Rae.) So! You tell him your answer tomorrow. This is great. I can't wait. He's going to be so happy when you tell him yes.

(RAE 1 screams.)

RAE

(Amazed.) What did you say?

RAE 2

I said he's going to be happy when you tell him yes. (To Rae 1.) And what are you screaming about?

RAE 1

(Shouts.) Are you crazy?

RAE 2

No, I'm not.

RAE 1

You must be!

RAE 2

I am not.

RAE

I can't marry Perry.

RAE 1

You most certainly cannot.

RAE 2

And why not?

RAE 1

Why should she? Why should anybody in their right mind....

RAE 2

(Interrupts.) Because he's a perfect choice.

RAE

I can't marry Perry.

RAE 1

A perfect choice?

RAE 2

Yes, he's perfect in every way.

RAE 1

He's a slimeball.

RAE 2

He is not!

RAE

I can't marry Perry.

RAE 1

You damn straight you can't.

RAE 2

(Almost whining.) Well why not? What's wrong with him?

RAE

I can't marry him.

RAE 1

He's too short.

RAE 2

He's the perfect height.

RAE 1

I want a man I can look up to.

RAE

Well, there are other ways of looking up to a man....

RAE 1

(Interrupts.) He's too skinny.

RAE 2

He's not skinny....he's slim.

RAE

The man is skinny.

RAE 1

And he's too dark.

RAE 2

Well I suppose you want a "high yellow nigger."

RAE

Well....

RAE 1

I don't want no black babies.

RAE 2

I don't believe you said that.

RAE 1

Well I did, and I mean it. I don't want no nappy-headed little black babies running around calling me Mama.

RAE 2

Perry does not have nappy hair.

RAE 1

Evidently you never tried to run your fingers through it.

RAE

His hair doesn't matter.

RAE 1

Doesn't matter? The man wears an afro....in this day and age, an afro!

RAE 2

I like his hair.

RAE 1

You would....

RAE

All right forget his hair.

RAE 1

Fine. We forget his hair. What about sex?

RAE 2

Oh come on!

RAE 1

Exactly my point!

RAE

All right what about it?

RAE 1

Perry can't do it all night.

(RAE laughs.)

RAE 2

What?

RAE 1

I said, Perry can't do it all night long.

RAE 2

Well neither can you for that matter.

RAE 1

Don't matter. I want a man who can.

(RAE laughs.)

RAE 2

I don't believe this. And what are you laughing about?

RAE

I don't believe this conversation.

RAE 1

Well you can laugh but I'm serious. You should want a man who can do it all night....just in case you wake up and want some more.

RAE 2

Oh God....

RAE 1

(Continuing.) And poor old Perry can barely get it up once, let alone keep it up for an extended period of time....and what about multiple orgasms....

RAE 2

(Interrupts.) Could we please move on? You have made your point.

RAE 1

Fine. Let's move on.

RAE

(Pause.) Well?

RAE 1

(Sarcastically.) He can't keep me in the style to which I have become accustomed.

(RAE laughs.)

RAE 2

And what style might that be? You are hardly living in the lap of luxury?

RAE 1

Well my lap is looking better than his at the moment.

RAE

But the two of us together would make enough to keep us comfortable....

RAE 1

(Interrupts.) The two of us together? Fuck that! I want a man who can take care of me all by himself, and to do that he needs to be making some serious money. Perry, my dear, does not qualify.

RAE 2

Perry makes enough to take....

RAE 1

(Interrupts.) Perry makes chicken shit.

RAE

He makes a decent salary.

RAE 1

I don't want decent, I want extraordinary.

RAE 2

You're asking for too much.

RAE 1

No I'm not.

RAE 2

Yes you are.

RAE 1

No I'm not! I'm asking for what I want.

RAE 2

You want the world.

RAE 1

I freely admit that.

RAE 2

Well that's too much. Nobody gets whatever they want. You have to settle for something....you know, that's your problem Rae. You never want to settle for what you can get. You always want more. You're never satisfied.

RAE

I know that. But is that so wrong? To want more....to want to be more?

RAE 2

You don't even know what "more" is.

RAE 1

Yes she does.

RAE

Yes I do.

RAE 2

Sure you do.

RAE

Yes....I do. "More" is everything. I want....everything.... I want to be known, to be....famous....to be respected. I want to write....and I want people to think I'm.... brilliant, you know what I mean? I mean, I want people to read what I have to say, and think it's important....I want people to wait....eagerly....for the next thing I have to say....I want....God, I just want....I just want to be who I am, to be what I am....

RAE 2

Who you are? What you are? What is that supposed to mean? And who cares anyway? You're being unrealistic. You've been reading too many of those "women" magazines.

RAE 1

(To Rae.) Don't listen to her. You can be who you are and what you are, as long as you don't marry Perry.

RAE 2

What do you mean as long as she doesn't marry Perry? He would only enhance her life....(To Rae.) Perry can make you a whole person.

RAE 1

Oh hell, he ain't God! She's all ready a "whole" person. It's when she marries him that she'll become a "half" person. When you get married everything becomes half.

RAE 2

(To Rae 1.) That's simply not true Rae.

RAE 1

Oh no?

RAE 2

No.

RAE 1

All right. (Pause, then to Rae.) You say you want to be a writer. God only knows why since there ain't no money in it and you write like shit....but that's what you want to be. Well what you think Perry's gone say about that?

RAE 2

Perry likes her work.

RAE 1

Well of course he does now, but is he gonna give his wife time to write? (To Rae.) How many times have you had to literally put him out of this house so you could get to work? How many times has he tried to persuade you to cook instead of write? Think about it Rae, then tell me if it's gone change for the better when you marry him.

RAE

Maybe he'll understand....

RAE 2

(Continuing Rae's line.)....once he sees how much work it takes.

RAE 1

Maybe I'll become queen of England tomorrow. (Pause.) What happens if you get pregnant Rae?

RAE

I'm not going to get pregnant.

RAE 2

What's wrong with having a baby?

RAE

I'm not going to get pregnant.

RAE 1

Remember that conversation about three weeks ago....Perry said he wanted to have at least five or six....just like his parents did.

RAE 2

So what's wrong with that?

RAE 1

Didn't he also say he wanted to start young....like next year?

RAE

I made it clear to him that I didn't want to have kids right away....at least not for another five years.

RAE 1

You think if you marry him now he's gonna be willing to wait for five years? Think about it.

RAE

I don't want to think about it.

RAE 1

Fine. Let's think about something else....like his political views.

RAE 2

What does that have to do with anything?

RAE

I don't care about his political views.

RAE 1

Does he care about yours?

RAE

What do you mean?

RAE 1

Does he care that you're on the campaign staff of a black man?

RAE

Of course he cares.

RAE 1

Does he think you're wasting your time?

RAE

Well....

RAE 1

(Interrupts.) Well hell! Does he think you're wasting your time or doesn't he? Or do you even have to answer? What else does he have to say about it? Huh? Isn't it Perry's view that a black man will never get in the White House unless it's to do the floor?

RAE 2

Well that's true isn't it?

RAE 1

For you to even ask that shows that you're just as much of a Neanderthal as Perry is.

RAE

All right Rae, you've made your point.

RAE 1

Have I? Has it sunk in that to marry this man would end your life as we've come to know it?

RAE 2

It would begin a new life....

RAE 1

(Continuing Rae 2's line.)....of his babies and his bills.

RAE 2

I was going to say of love and happiness.

RAE 1

The price of that love and happiness is intellectual death.

RAE 2

No it's not.

RAE 1

Yes it is.

RAE 2

No it's not!

RAE 1

Yes it is!

RAE

Oh stop it both of you.

RAE 1

Fine, I'll stop....just as soon as you realize that the last thing you need is to marry him. (Pause.) Do you see that Rae? Can you understand that?

RAE

(Pause.) I don't know....I mean maybe....maybe life with Perry wouldn't be so bad....

RAE 1

What?

RAE 2

She said she really wants to get married and that life with Perry would no doubt be wonderful.

(RAE looks at RAE 2 incredulously.)

RAE 1

Wonderful huh? Well so are chitlins, long as you don't think about the fact that you eating pig intestines.

RAE 2

That's disgusting.

RAE 1

Well that's just what life with Perry would be....just think about it Rae....a bowl of chitlins everyday for the rest of your life.

RAE

I will not marry this man.

RAE 2

Well now wait a minute....

RAE

No Rae....I hate chitlins, and I sure as hell don't plan to be exposed to them everyday for the rest of my life.

RAE 2

Would you stop talking about that and realize what you're saying? Perry is a man, not a bowl of intestines.

RAE 1

(Mumbles.) Depends on how you look at it....

RAE 2

Oh shut up! He is a man, and a good one at that. He has a good job, a nice car, and a nice home....and on top of that he's good to her. (Pause, then to Rae.) Whenever you need him for anything, he's there. Whenever you call him, he's home and if you want him to come over, he does. He always remembers your birthday, and not because you remind him. Last Christmas he showered you with gifts. He remembered Valentine's Day, for God's sake, and sent you three dozen roses. He knows your favorite drink, your favorite food....he even knows what dishwashing liquid

you prefer. He knows how to fix your coffee, how much sugar to put on your rice, how much butter to put on your toast, how much vinegar to put on your greens. (Pause.) And if we must talk about sex....he knows how to turn you on. (Pause.) He's not a millionaire Rae and he never will be, but he's happy with his job, and he's good at it. Now you can let this one get away if you want, but you will spend the rest of your life regretting it....and I'll never forgive you for it.

RAE 1

(Pause, then begins to clap.) Well bravo. I do believe that must be the best and most brilliant snow job I've ever heard you do.

RAE 2

I'm serious.

RAE 1

Oh give me a break please. Do you think he's going to keep sugaring her rice and vinegaring her greens after she marries him? Of course not! What's more, Christmas will become just another day, he'll remember to forget Valentine's and she'll be washing all the dishes so he won't care which liquid she prefers.

RAE 2

That's not true.

RAE

(To Rae 1.) You don't know that for sure.

RAE 1

It is true and I do know it. I'm telling you Rae, you marry this man and your life is over.

RAE

You're being melodramatic.

RAE 1

I'm trying to save your life.

RAE 2

She won't have a life without him.

RAE 1

Yes she will.

RAE 2

No she won't. (To Rae.) Don't listen to her Rae. Do you want to end up alone? Huh? Have you thought about that? You want to live "the single life" forever? Or do you want a home, a real home....not this hovel of an apartment, but a real home, with a husband, and a family.

RAE

(Quietly.) Oh God....

RAE 2

(Continuing.) You say you want more Rae. You say you want everything....well that's what he's offering....Perry's offering you the chance to have everything and to be everything you've ever wanted. Don't you see that? You could conquer the world with your words, and when the battle was over, at the end of every day, you could come home to a loving husband and a beautiful child....you can have it all Rae. Perry's trying to give it to you and all you have to do is take it.

RAE 1

(Long pause.) The world would never hear anything you had to say because your baby would be crying too loud....

RAE

What?

RAE 1

(Continuing.) And your loving husband might sympathize with your battle scars but he would be more concerned with what time you was gonna have dinner on the table....

RAE

I....

RAE 1

(Continuing.) And that beautiful child would have to be taken care of by you or someone else....

RAE

I know that....

RAE 1

(Continuing.) If by you, when you gonna write? If by someone else, how you gonna find someone you can trust? And let's not forget that "quality time" you supposed to spend with both your kid and your husband. When you gonna have a chance to be alone....to be who you are, and to do it alone?

RAE

(Long pause.) I don't know.

RAE 1

Well, I'll tell you....never. (Pause.) You got all the time in the world Rae. Wait a while, you've got no reason to be in a rush.

RAE

Yes I do.

RAE 2

I'll say you do. Your clock is ticking baby....loudly. And a man like Perry won't be around forever.

RAE

I know. I'm getting old.

RAE 1

No you're not Rae.

RAE

Yes I am. It's getting late.

RAE 1

No it's not. It's still early. There's still time to do all you want to do. You haven't made it to Africa yet, remember? Don't you remember that? Safari, huh? To see the land, the real land....Perry says his home is Georgia, but you know where yours is, don't you Rae?

RAE

But....

RAE 1

(Continuing.) And the campaign? Jesse's still running.... don't you want to see him win?

RAE

Yeah, but....

RAE 1

(Continuing.) The race Rae....the race....it ain't over yet....don't you know that? Are you ready to give up on everything? On all of it? Do you love him that much?

RAE 2

None of that stuff matters.

RAE 1

I'm not talking to you dammit!

RAE 2

(Shouts.) Well I'm talking to you, and none of that stuff matters! The only thing that matters is her happiness!

RAE 1

(To Rae.) Is that where your happiness is Rae? Is it?

(RAE 1 and RAE 2 stare at RAE for a long while. RAE then begins to get ready for bed.)

RAE

I don't want to think about this anymore. I'm going to bed.

RAE 1

Are you happy Rae? Do you love him that much?

RAE 2

Of course she is and yes she does, now leave her alone.

RAE 1

Why don't you answer Rae?

RAE 2

Leave her alone!

RAE 1

Are you happy Rae?

RAE 2

I said leave her alone!

RAE 1

When she answers the question.

RAE 2

She doesn't have to answer. She doesn't have to answer to anybody.

RAE

Please leave me alone.

RAE 1

You only have to answer to me Rae....to yourself.

RAE

Leave me alone!

Stop it!

RAE 2

It's getting late.

RAE 1

Stop it!

RAE

It's getting real late.

RAE 1

Stop it!

RAE 2

Almost too late.

RAE 1

Would you stop it! Please! Stop it! Just stop it!

(Long pause. The three RAES finish preparing for bed. LIGHTS begin to fade. When all are settled, RAE 2 speaks.)

Goodnight.

RAE 2

Goodnight.

RAE

(Pause.) Goodnight Rae....don't sleep too long.

(BLACKOUT. The End.)

## AFTERWORD

Although it is difficult to portray the Black Experience on stage, it is even more difficult to portray that experience realistically. Some playwrights, whether black or white, male or female, when writing about the Black Experience choose to write what should be true, rather than what really is true. These writers produce characters who are often larger than life, who have experiences that are so devastating and horrific that the character can never rise above his or her circumstances; or characters whose lives are so rosy and bright that seldom does anything "bad" happen to them, and even when it does, these characters are able to rise above it, unblemished. I am not saying that there is anything necessarily wrong with writing this sort of play with these kinds of characters, but as a black playwright, I am much more concerned with bringing reality to the stage--the reality of the Black Experience. More importantly, as a black female playwright, I am concerned with portraying the struggle of the black woman to gain an identity for herself.

Portraying this struggle realistically is difficult. To do so means to confront the past, to acknowledge what has been too easy to forget. But this acknowledgement has lead to a greater awareness of myself. By understanding

what my foremothers lived through, I appreciate more the relative easiness of my own experience. My goal now is to educate my generation, to show them the difficulties of the past which have led to the opportunities of the present and future; and also to reeducate the older generation, to help them remember the struggles of the past so that these racial struggles will never again have to be lived through by anyone. An ambitious goal, I concede, but certainly not an impossible one.

In order to accurately depict the Black Experience one must first define it. According to Mance Williams, it is a condition of existence which may or may not include a Black Consciousness; and Black Consciousness is the "result of alienation between two groups, or races, of individuals that find themselves locked in a conflict of wills. . . a conflict that mainly has to do with sharp disagreement over what constitutes reality and the conditions for individual freedom"(31-32). In other words, the Black Experience is a state of existence and the Black Consciousness is a state of mind: one may be black, but not think or live as a black person, but one cannot think or live as a black person unless one is indeed black. Thus when a person is black, and lives and thinks as a black person, this person is aware of and has had the Black Experience. Indeed then, the black woman is indicative of the Black

Experience.

The distinction between the Black Experience and Black Consciousness should give some insight into the black woman's struggle for identity. The key words in the definition of Black Consciousness are "what constitutes reality," for everyone's perception of reality is different, and by far, the black woman's reality is much more complex. Her reality includes the fact that she is black, a truth that, though some have tried, is very hard to deny; and because of this blackness she has had to endure racial prejudice which meant staying in her place, under white rule. Her reality also includes the fact that she is a woman, and because of this she has had to endure male préjudice which meant staying in her place as a woman, under dominion of men. Therefore, the black woman's place was at the very bottom of the social structure, subject to the rule of the black man, and beyond him, the white dominant society: and in that place, certain things were expected of her--to be humble, docile, a faithful servant of her race, and the white race.

But with the advent of the Civil Rights Movement, the black woman found it increasingly hard to maintain this position. Because of the violence and unrest of that era, the black man was sometimes absent from the home because he was out fighting for the rights of his children or

because he had been killed in that fight. Therefore, the black woman became both mother and father to her children, and it was her duty to instill in her children the Christian values of right and wrong, good and evil. The instillation of these values made it increasingly clear to her that something was terribly wrong about the domination of one race over another. Thus docility and humbleness began to disappear, and in its place a certain anger and fierceness began to grow. The black woman was no longer willing to sit by and watch her man be killed, her children be harrassed, her race be ruled. She became an activist in the Movement, fighting and sometimes dying for the rights of equality. But her fight was two-fold: she began by fighting for equal rights for her people, but by the 1970's, she was fighting for her rights as a woman.

Consequently, the black woman's fight for identity is no secret to dramatists, for they have portrayed her struggle in a variety of ways over the last thirty years. More sensitive than other dramatists is the black woman playwright; because she has experienced the struggle for her own identity, she is able to create female characters who realistically portray that struggle. The black woman playwright is aware of the past stereotypes of black characters in general, black women in particular. The damage done by such stereotypes could have been irrevocable.

In the past, when black women saw themselves portrayed as prostitutes, humble servants, and various other degrading types, they could have started believing this is how their lives should be, and thus never strive to be or do more. Black women playwrights were very much aware that, in reality, there were several black prostitutes and servants; but these playwrights were also aware of the many black women who were struggling to rise above what society claimed they could be, and it is the reality of this struggle that black women playwrights began to bring to the stage.

This, then, is the goal of black women playwrights-- to teach their sisters that they do not have to succumb to what society says they must be, that indeed, they can be anything, do anything, and overcome anything to which they put their minds. The black woman playwright is very much aware of how the black woman needs to see herself portrayed. In the 1960's, she needed to see that it was okay to be a strong individual, fighting for the rights of her race. In the 1970's, she needed to see that it was okay to be black and that in many ways, black was indeed beautiful. In the 1980's, the black woman needs to know that it is okay to make choices she is now allowed to make, that she will be accepted by her family and her race, even if she goes against what they may want for her. Three black women playwrights in particular continue to strive

towards realistically portraying the black woman's struggle for identity. The works of Adrienne Kennedy, Alexis DeVeaux, and Alice Childress make a statement on what it means to be a black woman today, a product of the struggle for liberation of past generations.

". . . out of life and death essential--I find it necessary to maintain a stark fortress against recognition of myself." This is one of the main themes of Adrienne Kennedy's play Funnyhouse of a Negro. The above line is spoken by the main character Sarah, a young black woman with varying personalities: Queen Victoria, the Duchess of Hapsburg, Patrice Lumumba, and Jesus. Sarah has difficulty accepting her blackness and all that it implies, thus she tries to lose herself in her personalities. However, one of her selves, Patrice Lumumba, is black. In fact, Lumumba is a black African nationalist who was murdered, and it is this part of herself that reminds Sarah of her father, a very dark black man. Thus, Sarah can never really get away from her blackness. Throughout the play she claims to have killed her father by bludgeoning his head with a black, African mask, but other characters in the play tell us that in reality, Sarah's father hanged himself. Here again the key word is "reality." The audience is never quite sure what is real and what is not. It soon becomes clear though that Sarah's perception of reality is quite

unlike the three other characters who are not one of her selves. However, before the audience can figure out who is telling the truth and who is not, Sarah hangs herself, and a character other than one of her selves tells us that in reality, Sarah's father is a "doctor, married to a white whore . . . who eats his meals on a white glass table" (Kennedy 205). Here the play ends, and the audience is left to itself to decide what is reality and what is fantasy.

Even though the play is surrealistic, it is clear that the material deals directly with the Black Experience.

Showing the "interior reality" of being black, Funnyhouse is the "portrayal of a woman's struggle with self and internalized social and cultural forces" (Wilkerson 164), Kennedy's intent here is to honestly portray the workings of the subconscious mind of a black woman unable or unwilling to bear the social burden of being black in America. Although Sarah's conflict is internal and personal, according to Kennedy it is also symbolic of the "ambiguous state of a people who were created out of the clash of African and European cultures" (Wilkerson 166).

In The Tapestry, Alexis DeVeaux attempts to answer the question, "Are we always going to be operating on the level of struggle, or can we begin to set our sight on the level of potentiality?" (Tate 59) The play deals with Jet, a young black woman who is about to take the bar exam in

order to become a lawyer. Her girlfriend Lavender, and her boyfriend Axis, however, are tired of being ignored by her because she spends so much time studying. Both try to persuade her that she is asking for too much. When Jet tells Lavender that she wants to hand the world "a new set of rules," Lavender responds with, "You'll be fighting something with a built in anti-change factor"(DeVeaux 150). Finally, Axis grows tired of Jet's studying and leaves her in search of someone who won't "try so hard to be so different"(DeVeaux 186); Lavender leaves her because Jet is not much of a friend; and when the play ends, Jet is at the entrance of the classroom where she will take her exam.

Indeed The Tapestry is the story of a young woman struggling for an identity. As Jet says, "I want to be defined in my own terms, not somebody else's"(DeVeaux 170). Unlike Sarah in Funnyhouse, Jet knows what she wants to do and who she wants to be in this life. She is not confused about or adverse to the idea of being black. But what does confuse her is the attitude of her friend and lover. Jet does not understand why it is so wrong for her to want to make something of herself and why her friends seem so adverse to the idea. Jet accepts the fact that she is a black woman, but she refuses to accept the notion that she has a "place" in which she must stay. According to her,

too many black women, including Lavender, have accepted that place as their reality. These women "live in a too small corner of the world and struggle" (DeVeaux 170). She is not willing to be a part of such a struggle, but Jet is willing to reach for that level of potentiality that DeVeaux feels all black women should attain.

One of the most well-known and respected black women playwrights is Alice Childress. Childress is known for her stand that black life and black characters in the theater should always be portrayed as accurately as possible, and because of this stand she has refused various suggestions to change characters and actions to suit the tastes of an audience (Harris 68). In Trouble in Mind Childress addresses two issues: racial conditions in the theater of the 1950's, and a black woman's realization of her true identity. The setting for Trouble is the rehearsal of the play "Chaos in Bellesville," the story of a young black man who is lynched. "Chaos" is written by a white man who has very distorted views of blacks; thus, his play is full of virtually every stereotype of blacks ever known. The main character of Trouble is Wiletta, a middle-aged black woman who has been an actress most of her life and has found that she can deal with the stereotypes of blacks in the theater as long as she does not think about them. The trouble starts, however, when the white director forces Wiletta to seriously

think about her character so that the motivation for her movements will be natural. But this thinking leads Wiletta to question the motives of her character--a black woman who sends her son out to be lynched by a white mob--and consequently to question the motives for her own self. Wiletta begins to wonder why she has for so long put up with the prejudices and stereotypes imposed on her by the theater. By the end of the play she realizes that no mother would send her son to his death, and she refuses to play the part unless some changes in the script are made. By the same token, she refuses to continue to play the stereotypical and unreal characters that have been forced on her in the past.

As are most of Childress' plays, Trouble is instructive. Childress is not necessarily interested in giving answers, but more so in raising questions, issues, and ideas, and leaving her audience to think about them. At the end of Trouble the audience does not know if Wiletta will keep her job, or if the writer and director will agree to change the script. But if it was not before, the audience is now aware of the life of a black actress, and how easy it can be to lose one's identity without even realizing it. Wiletta has let herself become like the women Jet mentions in The Tapestry: trapped in a small corner of the world, and accepting that corner as their only reality. But it

would seem that Wiletta will no longer agree to be kept in that small corner, and will now strive for that level of potentiality that DeVeaux recommends for all women.

It is the responsibility of "those of us who care about truth, justice, and a better life" to tell the story of the black woman, and to tell it "with the full knowledge and appreciation of her constant, unrelenting struggle against racism and for human rights"(Childress, "Playwright Speaks" 79). Clearly, the above mentioned playwrights have striven towards this end, and this is also the goal of How to Liberate a Nation in Thirty Years or Less. The three plays, Wait til Morning, When the Cock Crows, and Eventide, work together as an entity to relate the struggle of the black woman towards an identity of which she can be proud.

Wait til Morning is the story of a mother and daughter both fighting for their lives. Alma's life revolves around her daughter Marie, and when Marie decides to join the Civil Rights Movement, Alma fears Marie will be destroyed; and for Alma, Marie's demise would be as if Alma too had been destroyed. Marie, however, is not willing to sit and wait for change. She cannot continue to live her life in the hopes that a miracle will occur. Marie is willing to fight for her race's right to live as a free nation and for her own right to live as a free black woman. Marie is

like Jet in that both women want to work toward changing their lives for the better, and both women realize that it is they who must do the changing without letting anyone hold them back. Unlike Sarah in Funnyhouse, who lets the circumstances of her color destroy her, Jet and Marie decide to control the circumstances of their lives, to try and achieve the possible levels of potentialities available to them.

On the other hand is Alma, who like Wiletta, has come to accept the world around her as the only one in which she can live. But unlike Wiletta, who, by the end of the play, seems to be about to make a change in her life, Alma will not change. She stands firm in her belief that we must "wait on the Lord," and it is this conviction that leads her to believe that she has lost Marie. For Alma's assertion is that God has no part in the Civil Rights Movement: "The Lord ain't in this....the Lord ain't with y'all." Thus, to be a part of the Movement is to be against God, and at the end of the play, when Marie walks out to rejoin the fight, Alma believes that Marie will be destroyed.

When the Cock Crows is the story of a black woman, Dailee, who wants to be white, and a white woman, Brenda, who wants to be black. In many ways Dailee is like Sarah. Just as Sarah has created a world for herself in which everything white is beautiful and blackness is evil, Dailee

has convinced herself that if she were only white, she could live a "normal" happy life. She would not have to deal with the supposition that she should belong to any one particular group, be it militant or not. Dailee feels that if she were white no one would expect anything of her except that she be herself. When she finally comes to terms with the fact that her "self" is black and there is no getting around that she does not, like Sarah, give up on her life, but instead decides to accept it. She realizes that a "normal" life is hers to have as soon as she accepts herself as she is and always will be--black.

Rae, in Eventide, is the culmination or product of the black woman's struggle throughout the past years. She is the black woman of today who is faced with the more domestic problem of who to marry and when to do it. In Eventide we find that the black woman's struggle deals more with her relationship with herself and her acceptance of herself as a whole person who is uniquely herself. This is not to say that the struggle for independence and racial equality are now null and void, for indeed that struggle is and always will be very much a part of the black woman's life. However, due to the successful movements of the past, the black woman now has more freedom in society; thus she has more time to focus on her own more personal problems. Rae is who Wiletta has a chance of becoming--a woman who is

aware of who she is, what she wants, and, most important, what she expects of herself.

In choosing names for their women characters, black women playwrights, like other writers, often choose names that will represent what the character stands for. When Adrienne Kennedy was a young girl, she knew a woman named Sarah who spent most of her time making up stories and living in a dream world, just as the Sarah does in Funnyhouse. Jet, in DeVeaux's The Tapestry is symbolic of the idea of "taking off," for Jet is about to embark on a new life for herself. The name Wiletta, in Trouble, is reminiscent of the idea of the "will;" in other words, by the end of the play, it would seem that Wiletta now has the will to change her ideas about her own life--what she will and will not accept about herself.

By this same token, I have tried to name my characters for what they symbolize. Alma in Wait believes in the power of God through prayer, and naming her I thought of giving "alms." Marie is the French version of the name Mary; and just as the mother of Jesus was a virgin, so is Marie--she is innocent in the sense that she has no idea how cruel and violent people can be towards each other until she experiences it for herself. In When the Cock Crows, Dailee is given this name because she hates the fact that she must daily live with being black. However, by the end

of the play, the acceptance of the fact that for the rest of her life she will be black gives her name and life a new meaning.

In Eventide, the name Rae is a bit harder to explain. Her name is purposely in opposition to the title of the play. In many ways the black woman is in the "evening" of her struggles. As stated before, the violent movements of the past are not as prominent today as they were at one time, and therefore the black woman has more time to devote to the personal aspects of her life. But even in this "evening" of her struggle for identity, there is still work to do both for herself and her race, and the black woman must never give up the hope of a brighter future for herself and her race.

How to Liberate a Nation in Thirty Years or Less is a study of what the black woman has had to endure in her struggle for an identity of which she can be proud. The past thirty years have not been easy and the struggle for liberation continues. The racial and sexual barriers of the past have been overcome, for the most part, but the black woman must now see to it that these restrictions are never again placed upon her, that she never again becomes the least important in the social structure. Thus she must be a dominant force in her public as well as her private life. She must continue to strive for a better future for

herself and her race so that the injustices of the past  
will never again resurface.

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HOW TO LIBERATE A NATION  
IN THIRTY YEARS OR LESS

by

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## ABSTRACT -How to Liberate a Nation in Thirty Years or Less

This report attempts to determine what it means to be a black woman today, by dramatizing the black woman's struggle for identity from the 1960's to the present. The struggle has been difficult, to say the least, for not only has she had to overcome restrictions imposed on her because of her sex and color, but, now that many of the racial restrictions have been lifted and almost forgotten, she has been left in a rather precarious position by her new freedom. This report examines that position and the uphill contention for its attainment, focusing on the inherent problems of combining in one person the values of the past, present, and future, and ultimately questioning whether that precarious but prized status was worth the contest.

This report consists of three one-act plays, each dealing with a generation's idea of how to be "free," and each preceded by a preface. The plays, Wait til Morning, When the Cock Crows, and Eventide, are set in the late 1950's, the late 1960's, and the present respectively, and each examines the relationship of the black woman to her family, race, and environment during that era. Following the plays is a Critical Afterword which examines the pieces as an entity, discussing how they fit together to portray the progress of the black woman from the fifties to the

present. Included is a discussion of some of the works of black playwrights Adrienne Kennedy, Alice Childress, and Alexis DeVeaux. These playwrights have ventured to dramatize the black woman's difficulty in freeing herself of stereotyped notions in order to achieve a realistic impression of her identity. Also included in the Afterword is an examination of scholarly studies on the nature and place of black women in society in relation to the three plays in the report.

Proceeding the Critical Afterword is a bibliography of works that were essential in putting this report together.